

MOTHERS' REACTIONS TO SEPARATION FROM THEIR PRE-SCHOOL
CHILDREN AS EFFECTED BY THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS AND
THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

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Kate Hooper Gorman

This study was a comparative, cross-sectional analysis of maternal reactions to separation from their young children at school entrance. The first observation was of mothers who were entering their children in school for the first time.* The second observation, made concurrently, was of mothers who entered their children in school at least six months before the observation. These were the "experienced" mothers.

The sample population consisted of 177 mothers drawn from nine schools. Data was collected by means of a written questionnaire, distributed to the mothers at the school.

The study sought to discover factors which might influence the ease or difficulty which a mother experienced during separation. Six major and seven minor hypotheses were tested.

The first hypothesis stated that reactions to separation change over time and will be most intense at the initial separation. It was confirmed. The separation reactions of the "inexperienced" mothers were significantly different from those of the "experienced" mothers,

*This group of mothers was called the "inexperienced" group.

and in the predicted direction.

The second hypothesis stated that separation reactions change according to the mothers' view of her relationship with her child and her perception of the degree of independence between her child and herself. It was hypothesized that a mother who was able to recognize her child as a separate individual, with needs different from her own, would have less difficulty at parting than a mother who saw her child as an extension of herself.

In the operationalization of the hypothesis, four different content areas were created. In the findings, two of these areas proved to have significant relationships to the mothers' difficulty separating: her early mothering experience and her assessment of the child's current level of independence. The mothers who indicated great satisfaction with the early mothering experience were the ones who had the most difficulty separating. Those who only moderately enjoyed the early mothering experience had a much easier time separating. Second, mothers who saw their children as able to function fairly independently were able to undergo the separation with much less anxiety themselves.

The third hypothesis examined the effect of a mother's social network on her difficulty separating. It was predicted that the more isolated a mother was, the more difficulty she would have separating at school entrance.

The findings confirmed the hypothesis for the "inexperienced" mothers. The ones receiving the lowest amount of support from their husbands, parents, and relatives were very clearly the ones who had

more difficulty separating.

The fourth hypothesis stated that mothers who had difficulty separating were less likely to find new activities and also less likely to have an improvement in their relationship with their children. The findings were not significant.

The fifth hypothesis stated that differences in the mothers' responses to separation related to their views of the school. Did they see the school as helpful and supportive, indifferent, or even intrusive? It was hypothesized that a mother who feels that the school cares about her child and herself will have an easier time separating. The findings were that there was no relationship between a mother's difficulty separating and her view of the school.

Hypothesis 6 stated that separation reactions related to the amount of separation experienced prior to school entrance. It was predicted that a mother who has frequently been apart from her child will experience less separation anxiety. Conversely, a mother who has never left her child will experience greater separation anxiety.

The hypothesis was confirmed. The mothers who spent more time away from their children before school entrance had an easier time separating from them at school entrance.

Hypotheses 7 through 13 explored the relationship of the main dependent variable, "difficulty separating" and seven antecedent variables: "general morale," "age," "social class," "ethnic group," "religion," "length of employment," and "number of children" None were found to relate significantly to "difficulty separating."

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CHAPTER I

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

"... For parents, separation is even harder than for children." - a teacher

The Research Problem

The study that the researcher is interested in undertaking was stimulated by her personal experiences working with mothers and young children, her knowledge of the current disorganized state of enrollment procedures in city day care, and her awareness of the current lack of information in the literature on mothers in general and mothers' reactions to separation from their children in specific. In addition, recent theoretical contributions in ego psychology, most notably those of Margaret Mahler, have demonstrated with great clarity the major role that the attitudes and behavior of the mother as the primary environment of the child have on the child. The researcher will now elaborate on each of these areas.

The researcher has worked at the Infant Care Unit and at city day care centers. As the researcher is a social worker, therapist, and consultant, a large number of women who are having difficulties with child rearing are referred to her. Many of these mothers have such strong attachments to their young children that they are unable to let

the children play apart from them, much less leave them with a baby-sitter. They place the children in school, but are then unable to leave them, or keep them home from school as much as possible. Such statements as, "The older child was ready, but the baby, she's so attached, she needs me," and "It's better that he go to school now, but I just don't feel safe leaving him here along yet," are far more reflective of the mothers' needs and concerns than of the children's. For the mother of an infant these reactions are not extreme, but in the mother of a three- or four-year-old, these reactions have serious implications for the future development of both the mother and the child. In searching for a means to understand this behavior, the researcher has discovered that many mothers have led lives of isolation, having no friends, a generally unsupportive extended family, and a poor relationship with the father of the child, if he is around at all. The mothers are, therefore, very dependent on their children to satisfy their own needs. Allowing the children to move towards increasing independence from the mothers is very threatening to them.

There seemed, thus, to be a strong correlation between difficulty separating from children and the isolation of the mothers. Moreover, the researcher found that when these mothers were placed together in groups with other mothers and children having similar difficulty, constructive changes occurred in their relationships with their children. Over the course of a year or two, as the mothers became more comfortable within the group, they began to turn to each other to satisfy their needs. This took the burden off the children and allowed them to move toward more independent play.

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This movement increased the researcher's interest in the relationship between mothers' separation reactions and their social network.

Other variables also seemed to relate to the mother's difficulty separating from her child, most notably the mother's own investment in child-rearing. Did she see herself as deriving her greatest satisfaction from raising her child, or did she search for satisfaction outside of the house in addition? Did she see the child as an extension of herself or as an independent being? The mother's age and level of psychological development seemed to influence this. The relationship among these variables seemed complex but fascinating.

A second factor stimulating this study was the state of current enrollment procedures in city day care centers. Until the fiscal crises caused great reductions in services, most day care centers had a staff member, usually a social worker, who did intake, familiarized the family with the center, introduced the children gradually into the classrooms, and helped the mothers find constructive ways to deal with the separation. The social worker then remained available to the mother throughout her child's stay in the school, thus providing the opportunity for continuing support.

With this service no longer available, mothers now have to go down to the central office of the Agency for Child Development for intake. An admissions person there informed me that this was a very stressful period for the families involved. The families are assigned a school where they do some final paperwork with the school's director. The mothers then meet the teachers, who are usually very busy attending to the children. For all the mothers, much less the ones who are hesitant

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about parting with their children, these experiences are stressful and impersonal. There is no one at the centers with whom the mothers can build a relationship. Moreover, teachers are not usually encouraged to talk to mothers about their feelings. As an official of the City's Division of Day Care, Eva Watson, told the researcher, "Teachers should not deal with mothers' emotional states. They don't have that kind of professional training." Who, then, helps the mothers? For many mothers, what would previously have been an already difficult experience can become now quite formidable.

A further boost to the researcher's interest in this study has been her interest in ego psychology. In her detailed studies of infants and toddlers, Margaret Mahler has focused on the importance of psychological separation between the mother and child. As the child grows, his sense of separateness from the mother changes continually. Yet the mother-child dyad is a dynamic unit. The mother grows and changes too. She must gradually separate from her child. While for some mothers the process seems natural and comfortable, for others it is fraught with anxiety. Many studies of the child's part in this interaction have sprung from Mahler's discoveries, but the contribution of the mother to the interaction seems still to be largely ignored. This study aims to contribute to knowledge building about this vital area.

Significance of the Study

As social work is an evolving profession, it is necessary for any study which seeks to advance social work knowledge to describe which frontiers of thinking are currently being explored. In order to do so,

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the researcher will first give a thumbnail summary of the history of this evolution, and then proceed to describe those frontiers to which this study will contribute.

A major source of social work's knowledge about man and his relationship to the environment has, historically, been psychoanalysis. In psychoanalytic theory and practice, the locus of a person's difficulties was seen as within the person. However the environment might impinge upon an individual, his reaction to that pressure stemmed from his internal workings - that combination of infantile history and biology that combined to create the personality. Given this theoretical framework, the only way to promote change in an individual was to analyze the inner structure, a process requiring long-term treatment. In this context, a mother experiencing acute distress at separating from her child would be referred to a therapist, who would then probe for her deeply seated psychological frailties. As the rigors in undergoing such a process are prohibitive for a multitude of reasons, a mother in need would have little access to help. Such an approach also leaves the school with no avenue towards alleviating a mother's distress. And social work, if following in psychiatry's footsteps as it often has, is also without access.

Aware of the limitations of a purely psychoanalytic theoretical orientation, however, social work as a profession has sought to broaden its knowledge base. Especially since World War II, it has incorporated components of theory from a wide range of disciplines other than psychology, including biology, ecology, and sociology. The result has been to bring about a new way of approaching people having difficulties.

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The impetus for change is no longer seen as emanating only from within the person, but can be initiated from without as well. In other words, the relationship between the individual and the environment is no longer a one-way street, but is now seen as a bustling two-way thoroughfare.

Foremost among the theorists seeking to extend and clarify the social work knowledge base is William Gordon. Gordon has studied the relationship between the individual and the environment with a view towards locating the domain of social work. He has concluded that the territory of social work should be at the exact junction, or "interface," between the individual and the environment, and that social work's expertise lies in enhancing the individual's "social functioning," i.e., his ability to cope with his environment. Social work knowledge, says Gordon, should stem from a study of coping patterns and environmental qualities. By doing this, social work will be able to extract knowledge from its own practical experience. Only in this way can it reduce its borrowings from other professions and consolidate its reaction.

Gordon's thinking is very relevant to the researcher's topic. A family placing a three-year-old into school is opening up a previously private and closed system composed, ideally, of a father, mother, and child, and coming face-to-face with a large institution. From this point on, the family and the institution will develop a complex series of interlocking dependencies. This is clearly a crucial interface. It could be argued that it is the child, not the family, who should be the central focus of observation at this interface. And in fact, Nancy Webb did her doctoral dissertation at Columbia University

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School of Social Work in 1979 on the topic of preschoolers' attachments to their caretakers. And certainly the field of education has concentrated almost exclusively on the child. Yet for the parents, also, this interface is important as they are relinquishing many of their caretaking responsibilities to the school and becoming, perhaps for the first time, part-time parents. The way the parents cope, or fail to cope, with these changes has important ramifications for the future development of the parents as well as the child, and for the entire family's relationship with the school. Investigating this interface, as the researcher proposes to do is, therefore, thoroughly in line with Gordon's proposed direction for building social work knowledge.

Gordon goes on to say that the social work profession must bring some expertise that is relevant and not elsewhere available. This brings us to a second way in which the researcher's investigation can make a contribution to social work knowledge. From the above description it is clear that placing a child in school represents a major transition for all parents, and can reach crisis proportions for some. Here is clearly a population of people with needs for information, support, and advice. Yet there is no one in the schools to meet these needs. Teachers are neither trained nor have the time to deal with parents' needs. Directors are frequently too busy. The needs, then, are largely unmet. It is here that social work could move in and make a valuable contribution. Social work, points out Yona Rosenfeld, a former professor of social work at Columbia University School of Social Work, is in the business of targeting populations with unmet needs and creating supportive structures. He uses the phrase, "inventing inter-

ventions," to describe social work's mandate to move into new areas where people are having trouble and develop ways of alleviating stress.

A third frontier of knowledge building in social work has been opened up to the profession by the application of general systems theory to social work theory and practice. The principles, described briefly below, have helped social workers broaden their basis for interventions in the following ways:

- 1) by emphasizing the viability of change occurring in the present rather than maintaining the belief that a person must come to terms with his past before change can occur. This provides social work with a rationale for intervening effectively into a crisis situation, to promote healthy resolutions.
- 2) by showing how many different routes can be taken to achieve a given goal. This allows social work to choose one or more different approaches to solve the same problem.
- 3) by showing how changes in one part of a system reverberate to other parts. In getting a broad picture of the person and his environment, social workers can shore up an area of weakness by working indirectly as well as directly.
- 4) by emphasizing the need of a system to have a continual new source of energy coming in from the outside in order to maintain health and growth. This alerts social workers to the need to direct support into areas where isolation and inaction have drained a system.

The impact of systems theory on social work has resulted in a burst of social work activity into new areas, foremost of which is social

networks. The need to take in and understand the broad picture of a whole person, within the context of his complex relationships with the environment, has opened an entire new area of the social work domain. This movement has influenced the aims in this study and led the researcher to include among the ideas she chose to investigate an inquiry on the social network of the test subjects. The goal in one section of the research is to correlate two variables, or two components, of a given system, namely, the strength of a person's social network in relation to the separation response. In this way the theory will be exposed to a bit of scientific investigation and some valuable information will be uncovered.

Germain and Gitterman have derived tremendous impetus in their work from general systems theory. They have combined it with aspects of ecology and of ego psychology and created a synthesis which they call the life model. This model represents their contribution to the struggle to topple the old medical model, which saw a person's problems as an illness, from its pedestal and replace it by a more humanitarian view of human welfare wherein problems are seen as normal parts of living. Stress and strain arising from particular situations and circumstances are viewed as stemming from the interaction of a person and his environment. A social worker can alleviate the strain by working either with the person, with the environment, or both. Certain situations and transitions, such as marriage and childbirth, have the potential of causing dysfunctional transactions between the person and his environment. These transactions are deserving of close scrutiny, in order to better understand the variables contributing to the

"problems in living." In the opinion of this researcher, entering a child in school represents one of these difficult transitions inherent in the life of every individual who has a child.

Every mother must find a way to adjust, but whether her means of coping are growth-promoting or growth-inhibiting for herself and her child remains a question. This study seeks to investigate this normal and inevitable transition as a problem-in-living. Information will be gathered to learn from those who cope well in order to help those who are not coping.

Finally, the importance of prevention in social work, as a profession which seeks to ameliorate human distress, and the role this study will play in promoting preventive measures will be discussed. Recently, a burst of interest in the development of the infant and toddler has revealed knowledge about the life-long ramifications of experience in early childhood. Because children are so malleable, while adults are more set in their ways, it is crucial for a profession such as social work to inform itself about ways to promote healthy growth and development in children, thereby helping many avert troubled futures. This study addresses itself to this concern. A child's first experience in school contributes to his future attitudes toward learning; and in turn, a mother's attitudes have tremendous bearing on her child's outlook. To help mothers find an adaptive solution to separation from their children is thus to promote future healthy growth and development.

To summarize, this study can contribute to several new frontiers in social work knowledge building. Studying mothers' reactions to separation will give information about an important interface, about

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social networks, about a normal problem-in-living, about the interaction of variables in an ecosystem, and point towards ways to promote prevention.

Aim of the Study

This study can contribute to the building of knowledge in several important social work areas, in particular, developmental needs of mothers and children, social networks, tasks of normal living, social functioning, targeting the needs of unnoticed populations, and prevention. Yet the ultimate purpose of such knowledge is a concrete one, namely, to translate it into practice. It is important to consider, then, the implications that this study has for social work practice.

The field of education, as it is reflected in day care, has focused intensely upon the needs of the child. Yet social work has a broader focus, and sees the child in relation to his family. As this perspective enables social work to make a valuable contribution to day care, social work has claimed it as a legitimate field of practice. As this study is concerned with mothers' reactions to physical separation from their children at school entrance, it can promote a family orientation to day care in the following ways:

1. By considering such variables as age, socioeconomic status, isolation, and psychological readiness, it will yield information on which mothers have difficulty with separation. This enables schools to identify and help those mothers more readily.
2. It will yield information on the nature of the separation process itself, exploring the extent of the actual disruption occurring in the mothers' lives.
3. It will yield information on the coping mechanisms which mothers develop to deal with physical separation from their children.

Educators and social workers working in schools can use this information to develop concrete procedures. More effective social planning can be instituted. For example, increased support for mothers who need it could be provided by mental health practitioners by setting up a self-help group of mothers within the school setting. Or, individual counseling could be more available at the beginning of the year as a routine part of the school's program. Moreover, teachers could be encouraged to view the transition time between home and school with increased sensitivity. Directors would become more aware of the need for more careful planning about orientation periods.

In these ways, the developmental needs of mothers, as well as children, can be given the attention they so rightfully deserve.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The aim of this study is to examine maternal responses to physical separation from their children at school entrance within the context of their view of the relationship to their child and their social network. This calls for coverage of three general areas in the review of the literature: 1) theories about attachment and separation, 2) theories about systems, ecosystems, and their variables, in particular social networks, and 3) studies about separation in day care.

Theories of attachment and separation are based on the assumption that growth and development arise in interaction between child and the important figures in his life. A pioneer theorist in this area was Erik Erikson, who, in his work "Identity and the Life Cycle," developed a psychosocial theory. He postulated that the individual, throughout his life cycle, progressed through a series of eight stages. Each stage had a crisis which had to be resolved in some way before the next developmental level could be reached. Important figures in the individual's life played major roles in helping the individual surmount each crisis.

Erikson conceptualized the eight stages, with their inherent conflicts, in the following way: the very young child had first to develop basic trust and put aside distrust. He then must resolve the conflict between autonomy and shame or doubt. Once through this crisis,

the conflict between initiative and guilt arose, and demanded its due. The fourth crisis emerged, in the latency age child, as the conflict between industry and inferiority. The early adolescent had to face the fifth: ego identity versus ego diffusion. Once resolved, the teenager moved into young adulthood, where he had to struggle with intimacy versus isolation. Moving into middle age, the individual had to deal with generativity versus stagnation and, finally approaching old age, the individual was faced with integrity versus despair.

It is clearly seen, even in this brief description of Erikson's theory, that, although he did not use the terms "attachment" and "separation," his theory begins to explore nature of the individual's ties to important figures in his world, and the changes in the nature of the quality and kind of relationships the individual makes throughout the life cycle. Moreover, Erikson's theoretical view of development as continuous throughout the life span provides a cornerstone to the current study. Each mother, placed into Erikson's schema has navigated with varying degrees of success through a number of stages, and is currently dealing with a conflict (probably between generativity and stagnation), the resolution of which will shape future development.

In his major two-volume work, Attachment and Loss, John Bowlby offers what he calls a working hypothesis about the nature of attachment. He defined it as "an affectional bond, enduring in nature and specific in its focus." He sees it as a reciprocal tie between the mother and child which is instinctive in that it serves both survival of the individual and survival of the species. This instinct, rooted in biology and physiology, aims at promoting social relatedness without which the human race would fail to thrive. Attachment flourishes best in a monotropic situation, i.e., between one mother and one child.

Attachment manifests itself in certain behaviors which change as the child develops. The infant exhibits five instinctive behaviors, which are all aimed at securing the proximity and attention of the mother. They are: crying, smiling, following, clinging, and sucking. These behaviors are seen as precursors of attachment proper, which develops at seven months. More sophisticated "signalling" behaviors and "approach" behaviors develop as the child matures.

The young child's need for the mother is so strong that he experiences separation anxiety in her absence. Bowlby sees this as a normal, natural reaction to the disruption, if only temporarily, of the attachment bond. By age three, however, the child is seen as having more control over his attachment behavior and can tolerate longer separations from the mother.

Changes in attachment behavior in the child can be accounted for in two ways. They can result from physical, biological maturation; or they can be shaped by parental responses. Anxiety and distrust can enter into the child's attachment bond if his parents don't respond appropriately to his behaviors. Separation from the mother can, under such circumstances, be overwhelming to a child. Bowlby sees school phobia as a manifestation not of the child's fear of school but of his fear of leaving home. He sees this phobia as a direct product of the parents' attitudes and behavior toward the child. This points naturally towards the need to study the mother's attachment to the child, yet Bowlby treats the mother's contributions to the interaction and the reason behind them only minimally, saying in "The Nature of the Child's Tie to his Mother" that "In the adult repertoire...like the old soldiers, infantile instinctual responses never die."

Yet what exactly determines the nature of the mother's bond to the child? What can disrupt it? How does an attachment form and change

between the mother and child over the course of development? Why would a child experience distress when apart from the mother, and why would the mother experience distress when apart from her child? These questions are crucial to this study, and ego psychology, which gives a detailed and comprehensive view of human attachment, provides more illuminative answers than does Bowlby's work.

Ego psychology is a body of theory originating in the 1930's, with Anna Freud's The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense. In the 1950's, it was expanded by Heinz Hartmann in Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation. More recent contributors have been René Spitz (The First Year of Life), Margaret Mahler (The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant), and Gertrude and Rubin Blanck (Ego Psychology, Vols. I and II.)

Ego psychology is a theory of interaction. It states that the neonate is born with a certain innate endowment into an "average expectable environment" (Hartmann). Growth and development occur as the child's innate capacities are quickened by the environment, which is, primarily, the mother.

The infant's psyche is at first an "undifferentiated matrix" (Hartmann). He is unable to distinguish himself from his mother, but exists in a "delusion that he and his mother are fused" (Mahler). Yet by the age of three, he will have developed, given the "average expectable environment," a sense of his own identity as distinct from that of his mother and other people. Mahler believes that this development of psychic organization occurs around issues of separation and individuation. She elaborates on a series of "subphases" through which the infant and toddler must pass in order to attain "psychological

birth" (Mahler, in The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant). By the time of this "birth," the child has gradually come to see himself as a separate individual. He is no longer dependent on the constant presence of his mother to feel secure. He has achieved "object constancy," which means that he is able to retain the images of his mother in his mind even if she is absent. And his sense of himself is sufficiently consolidated and clear that he does not feel vulnerable or incomplete without his mother. It is only at this point that a child is ready for school (A. Freud).

This theory goes a long way towards explaining the differences in separation anxiety in school-age children. Those who have attained object constancy can call on their memory of mother for comfort, and can thereby adjust to school. Those with less than psychic organization have not sufficiently separated their own self from that of the mother and thus have trouble tolerating separation.

Yet how does ego psychology explain a mother's separation reactions? Mahler says that the "separation-individuation process, like any intrapsychic process, reverberates throughout the life cycle. It is never finished; it always remains active; new phases of the life cycle see new derivatives of the earliest processes still at work"

(Psychological Birth, p. 3). A mother's representation, or mental image, of herself is a reflection of her own level of psychic organization. Her relationship with her child can be one in which her self representation is very fused with her representation of her child; or she can see both herself and her child as two distinct, separate beings.

It is in the context of this theory that the researcher wishes to

examine mothers' reactions to the school entrance of their children.

A second area to review in the literature pertains to theories about systems, ecosystems and their variables, particularly social networks.

An important aspect of this study concerns the relationship between a mother's reactions to physical separation from her child at day care entrance and her social network. This area of investigation stems both from the researcher's experience with mothers, described earlier, and her review of the literature about ecosystems and social network. The researcher expects to find that a very isolated mother, with a very limited social network, would have greater difficulty with physical separation from the child than one with a larger number of social supports. This finding would have practice implications for social work as it would point to the need to strengthen the social network of the isolated mothers. The importance of this effort is brought home by Brenda McGowan in Self Help and the Provision of Family Services: "...One of the major thrusts in the field today is the effort to identify ways in which professionals can enhance informal support networks and/or organize new ones in order to help people with normal life crises and transitions."

How has it come about that social work has developed such keen interest in social networks? As Carol Swenson points out in "Social Networks, Mutual Aid, and the Life Model of Practice," social work has historically focused on the individual first and either ignored his other relationships or actively tried to decrease the client's dependence on them. Three major theoretical additions to the social work

knowledge base can account for this about-face. The first is general systems theory. Systems are defined by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in General Systems Theory as "sets of elements standing in interaction."

Systems are characterized by certain concepts which, when applied to social work theory and practice by such theorists as Sister Mary Paul Janchill ("Systems Concept in Casework Theory") and Ann Hartmann ("To Think about the Unthinkable") can be summarized as the following:

- 1) The boundary of the "social work case" can be expanded to include not just the worker and the client, but other significant aspects of the client's environment as well; 2) Systems lead to "further elaboration, increasing complexity, and differentiation" (Hartmann). They are dependent on a continued supply of energy from the outside in order to remain open and functioning. Social work must search out closed systems which lack this input and are imploding; 3) A system moves towards homeostasis, which means it seeks to maintain an equilibrium among the elements within it. Disruption of the balance between the elements can cause a crisis. The resolution of the crisis can be in the direction of healthy adaptation or regression and defenses which further impair the system's functioning. Social work intervention can tilt the balance towards growth; 4) Among the various elements of a system, relationships are established which form a pattern or cycle of events. This cycle can be growth-producing or inhibiting and, again, social work can make a positive contribution; 5) The final systems concept is equifinality, meaning that many different routes can be taken to reach the same goal. For example, a social worker, in helping a child, can improve the spirits of a mother,

which in turn improves her relationship with her boss.

The purpose of this description of systems concepts is to show the major impact systems theory has had on social work by bringing to its attention the interaction between the individual and environmental forces. Also contributing significantly to this broadening scope has been ego psychology. As the researcher has previously described it, she will only add here that ego psychology also views growth and development as a product of interaction between the individual with his innate capacities and the environment.

The ecological approach to social work represents a major attempt to synthesize these two theories, ego psychology and systems theory within the context of social work, thereby creating a third theory which links the ego with the environment. In The Life Model by Germain and Gitterman, practice is seen as having a dual function: enhancing the adaptive capacities of the ego and also improving the quality of the environment. Problems are no longer seen as a client's illnesses or weaknesses, but are seen as problems in living resulting from the lack of a good fit between the individual and the environment. This shifts a lot of the burden off the individual and places it onto the attributes of the environment. The social worker can intervene as a helper or catalyst, instead of as an expert who has all the answers. The strengths of the client are taken into account, and the social worker, once having mobilized these strengths, can step out of the picture with the expectation that the client will now be able to carry on by himself. This reduces the dependency of the client on the social worker and brings in the question of the efficacy of short-term

treatment. The social worker can also effectively intervene in the social and physical environment by setting up new patterns of communication, expanding its resources, introducing new elements; etc. By simultaneously helping people and their environments, social work can significantly smooth out "dysfunctional transactions" between the two.

What kinds of transactions result in "problems-in-living?"

Germain and Gitterman find three general areas calling for help. The first is "transitional problems and needs." Here the individual's movement through maturational and developmental stages causes him to modify his old ways of coping with the environment and develop new, more adaptive ones. A new job, a "status-role" change (i.e., marriage), or a sudden crisis can also threaten the person's equilibrium in relation to the environment.

A second area of help identified in the "life model" is the nature of the physical and social environment, which can enhance people's coping capacities or erode them.

A third area of help arises from the nature of the individual and other members of his group, whether it's family, social, or work-related group. It can happen that an individual's needs, stemming from his particular developmental stage, are at odds with the needs of those in his immediate environment. The result can be a series of dysfunctional transactions.

Germain and Gitterman's life model provides the conceptual framework for this study. The three areas wherein people need help all arise in the situation which the researcher proposes to study. Firstly, the mothers entering their children into school are facing a normal

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life task which represents a status-role transition for them. They are no longer full-time mothers and must accept part-time status. Their coping capacities are challenged in adapting to this loss of function. Secondly, the nature of organization, in this case, the school, can either help or hinder their adaptation, and thirdly, the mothers are also facing a situation in which their own needs may be very different from their child's developmental needs, causing a strain in interpersonal relations. There are thus many reasons to anticipate that "problems-in-living" will arise out of this important ecological transaction.

In the context of the ecological perspective and the awareness of the impact of environmental forces, the importance of social networks has begun to be appreciated, for, according to Carol Swenson, social networks are an essential ecological variable. Study of social networks contributes towards making the social environment more decipherable. This in turn sharpens the social worker's skill in intervening.

"The concept of social networks refers to important figures in the environment, including relations, friends, neighbors, and peers," say Germain and Gitterman. It is crucial for the social worker to inform herself about the strength of the network in order to intervene effectively on behalf of the client. Swenson suggests making a "network status evaluation," which would gather information about the important relationships in an individual's life-space. This idea has been incorporated into this study.

Also important to this study is the literature on support groups. If assumptions are correct, it will be found that a mother with

little or no social network will have more difficulty separating. A practical outgrowth of this would be to organize support groups for the isolated mothers under the auspices of the school.

There is ample justification for this in the literature on self-help and social support groups. Networks in which people interact in offering mutual aid can take many different shapes and forms, from self-help groups to clubs to extended family gatherings. Brenda McGowan finds four main ways in which people help themselves. The first is to turn to the "do-it-yourself" literature. Facing a crisis, an unknown or a problem, an individual will often buy a book to supplement his resources before turning to a friend or a service. A second way, exemplified by the writings of Vattano, Gartner, and Riessman, is to form consumer organizations to increase control over institutions, organizations, and services. Community organizations are one such example. A third way in which people help themselves is through mutual aid groups in which reciprocity is the keystone characteristic. Caplan and Killilea in Support Systems and Mutual Help study this concept of self-help. A fourth way is to organize cause-oriented or value-promoting groups which focus on accomplishing one special purpose.

It is Caplan's concept of social support systems which is most relevant to this study. He describes many kinds of support systems, but says they all have a common goal: "To improve adaptive competence in dealing with short-term crises and life transitions as well as long-term challenges, stresses and privations."

Groups form, says Swenson, around a shared interest, concern or common life task. They can exist informally, as part of a larger formal

organization. Swenson quotes Litwak as saying that the separate but mutually interdependent existence of informal, primary groups and formal organizations provides the optimal situation for both.

A professional can play a significant role in such a collaboration by acting as a catalyst. In this way, important new linkages can be formed in the life-space of the mothers.

A third area of importance in the literature concerns the practical studies of separation between parents and children. An important contribution to knowledge about parental reactions to separation can be found in the work of Shirley Jenkins and Elaine Norman. These two researchers studied the reactions of parents to the placement of their children in foster care. They developed instruments to measure the quality and extent of the feelings involved and were able to record the "filial deprivation" of the parents. One of these instruments, "Parental Feelings Reported as Experienced on the Day of Placement," has been adapted for use in the present study.

Jenkins and Norman studied separation reactions under extreme conditions. Families were breaking down and children removed, at times forcibly, from their parents. The duration of the separation was unknown, but possibly long-term. Even the permanence of the separation was a possibility. There might be no reunion.

The focus of the present study is also the exploration of separation reactions, but as they appear in the normal, ongoing interaction between parent and child. Initial parting at school entrance is one instance where separation reactions have been studied. The bulk of

the literature concerns the child's reactions and ignores the mother's reactions. Neubauer, in "Issues in Early Day Care," points out that the institution of day care is very inflexible. A parent must choose between all day care or no care. The child's need for an alternative somewhere in between is not considered. The consequences of failure to meet the child's needs are very significant in the future development of the child, say both Neubauer and Heinicke ("The Organizations of Day Care").

Sally Provence, in "Program of Group Day Care for Young Children" lists the determinants of the impact of the separation experience on the child as 1) the quality of the child's relationship to the mother and to other family members; 2) the developmental status of the child; 3) the child's previous experiences with separation; 4) the quality of the day care program, and 5) the creation of bridges between the child, the parent, and the school. This study intends to find out if the same variables have an effect on the mothers.

To reduce separation problems, Provence suggests that the parents stay a while, that the child bring transitional objects to school, that the child have a primary caretaker at school, that the child's

competence needs to be promoted, and that games involving memories of home be initiated. Beyond Provence's listings, however, Yarrow in "Separation from Parents" says that "research on the evaluation of different approaches to reducing separation trauma is almost nonexistent."

Several studies on the reaction to separation have emerged from the field of education. Lillian Weber observed in her 1959 dissertation from Bank Street College a range of maternal behaviors, from the "overready mother to the underready mother." Gladys Reich did her Bank Street dissertation on "Separation Anxiety" and related it to Mahler's theory of child development. These studies are based on observations of mothers and children.

There are several studies in social work which are closely related to this study.

In 1978, Phebe Rich did a dissertation at Columbia University School of Social Work in which she compared the separation reactions of mothers to the placement of two-and three-year-old children in day care. One hypothesis was that there would be a significant difference in the separation experience of mothers who place their children in day care centers at the age of two and mothers who enroll their children when they are three. The finding was not significant. A second hypothesis related mothers' separation reactions to their attitudes toward the role of women in society. Here the hypothesis was supported for the mothers of the two-year-olds. A third hypothesis was that differences in the separation experience will relate to the degree of necessity involved in the day care placement. Here the hypothesis was

partially supported by the findings. The hypotheses in this study are clearly quite different from Rich's and they approach the same phenomenon from quite a different angle, as described earlier. It is believed that the hypotheses of this study come closer to accounting for the phenomenon and, therefore, the findings will be more interpretable. In addition, the population of this study covers a broad socioeconomic spectrum, whereas Ms. Rich's range was more limited, the test instrument of this study is an extensive written questionnaire, whereas hers was an interview, and a larger number of research subjects was used. Despite these differences, Rich's dissertation is the closest to this study that has been found and her research has been incorporated into it by using some of the same questions she used in her assessment of a mother's separation experience.

Another recent Columbia University dissertation, that of Nancy Webb in 1979, has bearing on this study. Her topic was "Attachment Relationships of Preschoolers to Parents and Other Familiar Caretakers: Implications for Day Care and Working Mothers." Her hypotheses were that: 1) "children with little experience with multiple caretaking and no previous group experience may experience anxiety when enrolled in Day Care at age three, and that 2) children whose mothers return to work during the first year-and-a-half of their life form attachments beyond the nuclear family which seem to aid their adjustment to the Day Care environment at a later age." Findings showed that all the children had strong attachments to their mothers and generally preferred them over other caretakers. Ms. Webb, while examining the child's side of the dyad points out the dearth of information about the

mother's contribution to it, and stresses the need for more research in this area. This study is an attempt to investigate this neglected subject.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN

The research problem called for a design which could accommodate a large number of complex variables, a large sample size, and provide a comparison between the separation reactions of the mothers of 3 year-olds, and those of the mothers of 4-year olds. The design chosen as ideally suited to meet these needs was a descriptive survey in which comparative cross-sections of two groups could be made.

This design required 2 sets of data collection, O₁ and O₂. The O₂ questionnaire was exactly like the O₁ questionnaire but had the addition of a section on coping mechanisms.

The O₁ questionnaire was given in September to the group of mothers of the newly entering class, the three-year-olds. This questionnaire gathered information on the current nature of the separation reactions, covering both attitudes and behavior. It was expected that reactions recorded in this instrument would be the most intense, as many of the mothers were in the process of separation for the first time.

As a comparison, the O₂ questionnaire was given at the same time to the mothers of the four-year-olds, who had had their children in school for a year. This questionnaire elicited information on the nature of the current separation reaction of each mother from her child and on the adjustments she had made over the course of the year to the initial separation.

Collecting data from the field was a logical outgrowth of the research problem. The researcher needed to get information from

the mothers themselves. The most naturalistic setting was the school.

As all the mothers to be tested were putting their children into school, a true experiment in which there was a treatment group and a control group was impossible. The "environmental variable" could not be controlled. Yet it was possible to control for "who" was tested and "when".

As to who, the sample was restricted to mothers for three reasons: firstly, mothers are likely to be the ones bringing the children to school; secondly, grandparents, fathers, etc., could complicate the picture unnecessarily; and thirdly, mothers are usually the primary caretakers of children, and therefore are the most appropriate population for this particular study.

As to "when", conclusions were drawn from both reading of the literature and professional observations that separation reactions change over time. In order to reflect these changes in the data, the researcher wanted to collect data from two different sources. Development would be looked at as a series of independent progressions. These considerations led to choosing a comparative cross-sectional design as the appropriate vehicle for the study.

This design is well-suited to the purposes of the study because it is particularly useful in institutions, such as schools, where the experimental variable (separation) is recurrent and continually being presented to a new group.

Every design has its vulnerabilities, and, in this instance, the impact of certain extraneous variables needed to be considered in planning the study. These variables can confound the data, and

effect the validity and reliability of the study.

Maturation is a variable which involves growth and development of the test subjects over time. In this study, one group of respondents is a year ahead of the other in terms of experience. However, as maturation is a central process under investigation, failure to control for it here is not a weakness.

Instrumentation can be a confounding variable. A different atmosphere, interviewer, test instrument, and/or attitude can cloud test results. Attempts to avoid this were made by keeping the atmosphere, attitude, instrument and interviewer the same for each school. Variations between schools were not only unavoidable, but planned for to a certain extent so that there would be a broadly based study population. (See section on study population for further details); In addition, although O₂ has an additional section, the rest of the questionnaire is identical to the O₁ questionnaire. Thus the effect of instrumentation was kept to a minimum.

History remained a confounding variable in the O₁-O₂ comparison, as extraneous independent variables could have operated on the O₂ group of mothers in the year since their first contact with the school. A divorce, for instance, could strongly influence the relationship between a mother and child. An attempt to control for history was made by including in the O₂ questionnaire a section on new activities and events occurring within the year.

Problems could also arise from respondents being selected differently from one year to the next. However, an investigation into the admissions processes confirmed that they have remained constant.

Mortality, or subject drop-out was also an intervening variable to be considered. Mothers who had great difficulty adjusting to separation may have withdrawn their children from the school, therefore biasing the O₂ observation. This would show up on the school records and attempts were made to determine the reasons for the withdrawals.

Measurement itself can be a source of extraneous variance as the measuring procedure itself can have an impact on the test subjects. However, as both groups will undergo the same procedure, this interference will not be an intervening variable.

As to the reliability of the study, reliability was increased by efforts within the questionnaire to ask the same question in different ways. In addition, distributing the questionnaires to all the mothers of the three and four year olds, introducing the test instruments as a routine aspect of the beginning of the school year, collecting the two observations at the same time of the year, and limiting the period of data collection to the first month after school opening all represent efforts to safeguard against intervening variables and improve reliability and validity.

The external validity of the study was also considered and, as the study population chosen was one of convenience, no attempt was made to generalize the results of the study. Findings will apply only to the respondents of the questionnaires and are not representative of a larger population.

A final attempt to safeguard reliability and validity was made in the choosing of the statistical method for the analysis. Given

a dependent variable as abstract was "difficulty separating," it is important not only to consider the influence of a number of variables, but to consider their impact jointly. Only a statistical method like multiple regression analysis in which a number of variables can be controlled for at once, can do justice to the research problem.

Recruitment and Description of the Study Population

A sampling plan was chosen which would gather data from mothers who cover the spectrum on a number of variables, including socioeconomic status, age, education, and employment. To facilitate this, schools were chosen which would provide good comparisons between the variables. Some had half-day programs and some all-day programs; some schools served a middle and upper-middle class population and some served a welfare and working-poor population. Nine directors were approached 4 from private schools and 5 from schools with some city funding and some private funding. After consultation with their Boards, all directors agreed to cooperate, and all nine schools were included in the sampling plan.

It was therefore necessary to hire three research assistants to help with the distribution. Three graduate students, two in social work and one in education were found, and a meeting was held to discuss how to make procedures uniform.

The instruments developed were self-administered, and available in both English and Spanish. Help was offered where needed, as will be described later. The way in which the questionnaire was introduced to the respondents depended on the preferences of the directors

of the various schools involved, to be described in another section of the study. The directors were asked to present the questionnaire as a normal, natural aspect of the school's program. This was a way to increase reliability and validity, and reduce bias. Directors were cooperative in doing this.

The distribution procedure was the same for 7 of the 9 schools. In 7 of the schools a table was placed by the entrance of the school at the beginning of the day. A researcher sat at the table and distributed the questionnaires, which had an introductory letter, to the incoming mothers. The mothers took the questionnaires home or to work with them, with the request that they bring them back that afternoon or as soon as possible. The same researcher then sat at the same table that afternoon to gather in questionnaires already finished and to encourage those mothers who had not yet completed the questionnaire to do so. The researcher continued to sit at the table at arrival and departure time for the next day and a half to continue to encourage respondents. It was necessary for the researcher to be present at the schools both at the beginning of the day and at the end, in order to facilitate the data collection from the mothers who were working, and also as the data gathering locations were widely dispersed.

In the other two schools, the directors preferred a slightly different distribution procedure. One director asked the researcher to come to a PTA meeting to distribute the questionnaires. Here the response rate was very high (almost 95%) as mothers filled out the questionnaires at the meeting. The other director asked the researcher

to put the questionnaires in the children's cubbies. Here only 42 percent of the questionnaires were returned, showing the need for face-to-face contact in obtaining responses.

A total of 370 questionnaires were distributed in the 9 schools. The average response rate was 50 percent, and 181 were returned. Many factors can account for this return rate. The reasons mothers gave for not returning the questionnaires were:

1. It's too long (20 pages)
2. It took a lot of time (45 minutes)
3. It was personal (asking income)
4. It asked for the name of the respondent
5. It was difficult to return the questionnaire as delivery and pick-up of the children was frequently done by babysitters, fathers, friends, etc. For instance, a mother might pick up the questionnaire, take it home, but then not be returning to the school to bring back the questionnaire.

The 50 percent response rate raised the question of whether or not the respondents were representative of the school population as a whole. In order to answer this question, the directors of each school were asked to give the demographics of their population of mothers. As information on age, education, income, etc. was not routinely gathered by each school, directors were asked to give their best estimates. In this way, the characteristics of the respondents could be compared with those of the whole school population, increasing generalizability of the findings. Table 3-1 shows the comparison between the general population of each school and the sample data.

TABLE III-1
COMPARISON BETWEEN DEMOGRAPHICS OF SCHOOL POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF SAMPLE POPULATION

	Age	Education	Religion	Income	Ethnic Group	%	Marital Status		Employment	
							Married	Single	F/T	P/T
<u>School 1</u>	30's	4 years college	Jewish	Mid to High	White, Jewish		Mostly Married			
Sample Data	25-34	4 years college	Jewish	30-40,000	White, Jewish	97%	97.5%		12%	13%
<u>School 2</u>	32	4 years college	Jewish	High	White		Married 99%		55%	20%
Sample Data	25-34	4 years college	Jewish	50,000 or over	White	100%	Married 94.4%		8%	13%
<u>School 3</u>	33	4 years college	Jewish	High	White		Mostly Married		55%	20%
Sample Data	25-34	Some grad.	Jewish	40-50,000	White		Married 100%		—	16%
<u>School 4</u>	30's	4 years college	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed		Mostly Married		Mixed	
Sample Data	25-34	4 years college	Protestant	30-40,000	White	89%	Married 82%		31%	27%
<u>School 5</u>	30's	2 years college	Mixed	12,000	White, Black, Hispanic	33.3%	Married 60%		100%	
Sample Data	25-34	4 years college	None	10-20,000	White, Black, Hispanic	54% 27% 18%	Married 38%	Single 38%	69%	—
<u>School 6</u>	30	2 years college	50% R.C. 50% Prot.	10,000	White, Black, Hispanic	50% 30% 20%	Married 75%		100%	
Sample Data	25-34	4 years college	50% R.C. 50% None	10,000 Under 20	White, Black, Hispanic	42% 25% 25%	66%		33%	25%
<u>School 7</u>	30's	2 years college	Protestant	12,000	Mixed		Married 33%		100%	
Sample Data	25-34	4 years college	Protestant	10-20,000	White, Black, Hispanic	56% 22% 11%	Married 44%		66%	—
<u>School 8</u>	28-34	2 years college	Protestant	18,000	White, Black, Hispanic	50% 25% 25%	Mostly Married		Both: 80%	
Sample Data	25-34	4 years college	Jewish	20-30,000	White, Black, Hispanic	76% 6% 12%	Married 64%		41%	6%
<u>School 9</u>	Under 28	2 years college	Mostly R.C.	6,700	White, Black, Hispanic	50% 10% 40%	Married 15%		80%	
Sample Data	25-34	Some college	Mostly Protestant	Under 10,000	White, Black, Hispanic	23% 31% 38%	Married 23%		30%	15%

The 181 questionnaires which were returned were excellent both in the quality and quantity of the information gathered. All questions were filled out and many comments were included. In general, comments indicated that the mothers found the questionnaire to be very interesting and relevant.

Description of the Study Population

The study population consisted of 177 women. The age of the women ranged from under 25 to over 44. However, the majority of the women were between age 25 and 34.

TABLE III-2

AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Category	Number of Mothers	Percent
Under 25	6	.03
25 - 34	116	.66
35 - 44	53	.30
44 Plus	1	.005
Total	177	100

The income level of the population covered a broad range, with 59 of the 177 women living on less than \$20,000 a year, and 49 living

74
on over \$50,000 a year.

TABLE III-3
INCOME OF FAMILIES

Category	Numbers	Percent
Under \$10,000	21	13.7
\$10,000 - \$19,999	38	23.6
\$20,000 - \$29,999	23	14.3
\$30,000 - \$39,999	20	12.4
\$40,000 - \$49,999	9	5.6
\$50,000 or Over	49	30.4
Missing	<u>16</u>	<u> </u>
Total	177	100.0

The education level of the population was dispersed, but slightly heavy on the very well-educated end of the spectrum.

TABLE III-4
EDUCATION OF MOTHERS

Category	Totals	Percent
Some high school	3	1.7
Finish high school	16	9.0
Some college	35	19.8
Finish college	39	22.0
Some graduate work	28	15.8
Finish graduate work	51	28.8
Technical degree	5	2.8
	177	100.0

A large percentage of the women were married (76.8%).

TABLE III-5
MARITAL STATUS

Category	Numbers	Percent
Single	18	10.2
Married	136	76.8
Divorced	19	10.7
Living with partner	4	2.3
Total	177	100.0

The ethnic composition of the sample was predominantly White, with a few Blacks and Hispanics. In order to provide a group large enough to use for comparison, the Blacks, Hispanics and Orientals, and "others" were combined into one group. Thus, two categories were formed: White and Non-White.

TABLE III-6

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF MOTHERS, UNCOLLAPSED

Ethnic Group	Numbers	Percent
Hispanic	16	9.2
Black	13	7.5
White	140	80.5
Oriental	4	2.3
Other	1	.6
Missing	<u>3</u>	<u>-</u>
	177	100.0

TABLE III-7

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF MOTHERS, COLLAPSED

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
White	140	.82
Non-White	30	.18

The employment status of the women in the sample was highly variable. There were 69 who were homemakers, 47 who worked full-time and 30 who worked part-time.

TABLE III-8
EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF MOTHERS

Category	Numbers	Percent
full-time	49	26.6
part-time	30	16.9
homemaker	69	39.0
student	15	10.2
unemployed	12	6.8
other	1	.6
Total	177	100.0

The length of employment varied widely, with the highest number of mothers working for over five years. In the analysis, the six response categories were reduced to two, one for those who had recently begun working and the second for those who had been working for longer than six months. There were 18 mothers who had begun working within the past six months. The rest had been working for six months or longer.

TABLE III-9
LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT

Category	Number of Mothers	Percent
Less than 2 months	10	12.0
Between 2 and 6 months	8	9.6
Between 6 and 12 months	10	12.0
Between 1 year and 3 years	23	27.7
Between 3 years and 5 years	7	8.4
More than 5 years	25	30.1
Missing	94	Missing

Of the families in the sample, 85 had only one child, 74 had two children, 16 had three children, and two had four children. Of the children, 89 were boys and 80 were girls.

TABLE III-10
NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FAMILY

Category	Number of Families	Percent
1 child	85	48.0
2 children	74	41.8
3 children	16	9.0
4 children	2	1.0

TABLE III-11

DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN ACCORDING TO SEX

Category	Number of Children	Percent
Male	89	.53
Female	80	.47
Total	169	100.0

The social class of each respondent was determined by the Two Factor Index of Social Position, developed by Hollingshead and Redlich. The two factors considered were occupation and education. Scores range from one to five, with a low score indicating an upper class position.

The majority of the respondents fell into the first class, but Class II and III were also well represented.

TABLE III-12
SOCIAL CLASS OF FAMILIES

Category	Number of Families	Adjusted Percent
Social Class I	66	37.9
Social Class II	46	26.4
Social Class III	47	27.0
Social Class IV	15	8.6
Missing	3	
Total	177	100.0

The level of general morale of the population as a whole was high. Only 4.6 percent of the respondents indicated that they were fairly dissatisfied and unhappy with their lives. The majority of respondents (64%) were fairly satisfied and happy with their lives.

TABLE III-13
GENERAL MORALE AMONG RESPONDENTS

Category	Number	Percent
Very satisfied, hopeful, happy	2	1.2
Fairly satisfied, hopeful, happy	111	64.2
Somewhat satisfied, hopeful, happy	52	30.1
Fairly dissatisfied, unhappy	8	4.6
Very dissatisfied, very unhappy	0	0
Missing	4	

As to religion, predominant religion of the sample population was Jewish. In order to construct an acceptable comparison group, the categories representing "Roman Catholics," "Protestants," "Others," and "None" were combined. The analysis was then performed using the two groups, "Jewish," and "Non-Jewish."

TABLE III-14
RELIGION, UNCOLLAPSED

	Number	Percent
Roman Catholic	25	14.1
Protestant	23	13.0
Jewish	96	54.2
Other	7	4.0
None	26	14.7
Total	177	100.0

TABLE III-15
RELIGION, COLLAPSED

	Number	Percent
Jewish	96	54.2
Other	81	45.8

HYPOTHESES

This study explores the possible contribution of a number of variables to a mother's difficulty separating. Variables were organized around six major hypotheses and seven minor ones. The major hypotheses relate a mother's level of experience in separating, her social network, her attitudes toward the child, and the nature of her coping mechanisms to her difficulty separating. The minor hypotheses are organized around such variables as age, religion, ethnicity, social class, length of employment, number of children, amount of previous separation, and overall level of general morale.

These hypotheses will now be explained in more detail.

Hypothesis I: Mothers reactions to separating from their children change over time, with initial reactions to separation more intense than later reactions.

Data were collected from mothers by means of a questionnaire. Two groups of mothers were called upon. The first group of mothers are those currently entering their children into school. This group of mothers will be experiencing physical separation from their children for the first time, in many instances. These mothers will be referred to as the "inexperienced" mothers. The second group consists of mothers who entered their children in school six or more months ago. These mothers are used to daily separations and will be referred to as the "experienced" mothers.

The independent variable here was the experience level of the mothers (newly entering or a veteran). The dependent variable was the difficulty separating.

Questionnaires were handed out to each group of mothers at the same time, namely, the beginning of the school year. The questionnaires were identical except for the addition of a section on coping mechanisms in the questionnaire for "experienced" mothers.

Collecting data on mothers' reactions to physical separation at two distinct points in time presented an opportunity to examine an aspect of the current theory on separation, namely, that reactions to separation change over time. Bowlby, the ego psychologist, as well as the specialists on day care (such as Sally Provence) all agree on this point. Their work is discussed in the literature review. The hypothesis states that the reactions to physical separation will be most intense at the initial separation, before the mothers have had time to find adequate coping mechanisms. A year later, mothers will have found ways to adapt.

Questions in the instrument relating to this hypothesis ask the mothers about their difficulty separating from their children and their feelings about the event. One question asked the mothers directly: "How hard was it for you to leave your child at school this year?" (Answers overall fall along a continuum of very hard to very easy.) Others were more directed towards the type of difficulty: "How worried or how relieved did the mother feel?"

Several questions were adapted from the research of Shirley Jenkins and of Phebe Rich as a way of increasing the validity of the study. Jenkins developed an instrument to assess maternal responses to separation. Rich later used this measure to compare the separation reactions of mothers of two-year-olds with those of three-year-olds. Jenkins work and Rich's dissertation are discussed in the literature review.

Hypothesis 2: The second hypothesis is that the extent to which a given mother experiences difficulty upon separation from her child at school entrance is a function of her views of the level of independence she thinks exists between her child and herself.

For instance, a mother who sees her child as a separate individual will have less difficulty at parting than a mother who sees her child as an extension of herself. The independent variable here is the mother's view of the child and the dependent variable is difficulty separating. This hypothesis is rooted in the theories of ego psychology, particularly Margaret Mahler. Mahler sees the ongoing process of development as organized around separation and individuation. Her theories are explained in more detail in the literature review.

To test this hypothesis, an analysis will be made of each mother's view of her child in relation to herself.

In order to measure these very abstract and elusive attitudes, questions pertaining to this variable (mother's view of the level of her child's independence from her) were divided into 3 different groups. Each group approached a given mother's attitude from a different angle, and thus served as a means of improving the internal validity of the testing of the hypotheses.

The three groups considered were 1) the mother's views about her child's ability to function independently, 2) the mother's views of her own dependence on her child, and 3) the mother's perception of her child's level of differentiation from herself. The rationale for and the explanation of these three ways of operationalizing the hypothesis is given below.

A score will be developed based on the mothers' answers to the questions in each group. The score will then be compared to her score on the questions about the amount of difficulty she experiences at physical separation from her child.

Questions pertaining to these hypotheses were drawn from two sources. One was Mahler's case studies about child development and problematic mother-child interaction. In these case studies specific aspects of a child's behavior were viewed as manifestations of the child's level of independence. Questions for the test instrument were derived from these discussions of behavior. Sample questions were:

1. Does your child initiate activities with other children?
2. Does your child choose his/her own clothes?

Other questions drawn from Mahler's discussions tapped the mother's attitudes toward her early mothering experience.

A second source of questions relating to this hypothesis was an adjective checklist developed by Dr. Lloyd Silverman of New York University. He used checklists to determine the self-object differentiation (or degree of symbiosis) between adult schizophrenics and their mothers. He asked his respondents to rate themselves in relation to 20 adjectives. He then asked them to rate a non-descript picture of an elderly woman on the same list of adjectives. By comparing responses given these two lists, Dr. Silverman arrived at a score indicating the level of self-object differentiation of his schizophrenic population.

Dr. Silverman's adjective checklist was adapted to suit the population of this study. Respondents were asked to first describe themselves according to the adjective checklist, and then to describe their children. By comparing the two lists, the researcher was able to get a measure of the self-object differentiation (or degree of symbiosis) of the mother with her child. She can then compare the results of this test with the scores derived from the other questions in this section, enhancing the reliability of this section of the questionnaire.

Hypothesis 3: The third hypothesis is that differences in a mother's reactions to physical separation from her child will be a function of the strength of the mother's social network.

The dependent variable here is difficulty separating and the independent variable is strength of the mother's social network. The stronger the network, the more the mother will be able to cope with the physical separation. This hypothesis is rooted in general systems theory and the ecosystems perspective, which states that an upheaval in one part of a system has reverberations throughout the system, disrupting its equilibrium. The balance between the various parts, or subsystems, can be restored in an adaptive or a maladaptive way. In situations where the relationship between the subsystems is healthy and well-functioning, a crisis in one subsystem can be more readily absorbed. There is greater possibility for an adaptive solution. Translated into social terms, this means that the stronger the relationships that a mother has in her overall "social network," the more easily she will be able to tolerate a change in her relation-

ship to her child. Conversely, the more isolated a mother is, the more difficulty she will have adjusting to separation.

The researcher found no literature on this practical extension of social network theory to date, and for this reason presents the relationship between social networks and separation reactions in the form of a hypothesis. This hypothesis will be tested by means of an evaluation of the strength of each mother's social network.

Not on social support and life changes?

The term "social networks" is defined according to Gitterman and Germain as "important figures in the environment, including relatives, friends, neighbors, and peers." Questions will be asked about both the quality and quantity of the mother's social world. What are her relationships like with her husband, her parents, her relatives, and her friends? Questions were derived from a number of other questionnaires on family and social relations. None of these other questionnaires, however, evaluated the strength of the mothers social networks as a whole.

Sample questions were:

1. How would you rate the interest which your spouse has in your daily experience?
2. In general, can you count on your parents for support?

Hypothesis 4: The fourth hypothesis is concerned with the nature of the coping mechanisms mothers develop to deal with physical separation from their children. The hypothesis is that the mothers who have a difficult time separating will be less likely to find new activities (i.e., won't cope as well) and will be less likely to have an improvement in their relationship with their children.

The questions which will elicit this information are 1) Have your activities changed since you enrolled your child in school? and 2) Has your relationship with your child improved in any way?

Whereas in the other hypotheses the variable "difficulty separating" is the dependent variable, in this hypothesis, it is the independent variable, as it antedates the development of coping mechanisms. This hypothesis was only tested on the "experienced" mothers, who had sufficient time to develop ways of coping with separation.

Hypothesis 5: The fifth hypothesis states that differences in maternal response to separation will relate to the mother's view of the school as supportive and helpful or not. A mother who feels the school cares about the child and herself will have an easier time with physical separation.

This hypothesis is based on the studies of Sally Provence (described later) and on the guidelines for school entrance recommended by the Board of Education of New York City to the schools. It is suggested in this literature that a gradual transition should be made for the children from home to school, that parents should be oriented about the needs of children entering school. The purpose of these measures is to help the separation process go more smoothly. It is important to find out if the mothers feel the school is supportive and helpful in mitigating their distress. The hypothesis states that the mothers who feel the school has not been helpful will have greater difficulty with the separation process. The independent variable here is the amount of support the mother feels she is receiving from the school and the dependent variable is difficulty in separating.

This hypothesis will be tested by including in the instrument questions about the mothers' felt needs for support from the school. A sample question is "Did you feel that the teacher had enough time? Additional questions were aimed at finding out what exactly the school did do in relation to school entrance. The results of these questions will then be compared to the scores which indicate the level of distress experienced by the mothers at separation.

Hypothesis 6: Another minor hypothesis is that differences in a mother's reaction to physical separation will relate to whether the mother has been previously separated from her child for half-day periods or more, or whether this is a first separation. A mother who has frequently been apart from her child will experience less separation anxiety at school entrance. Conversely, a mother who has never even left her child with a babysitter will experience greater separation anxiety.

This hypothesis, like hypothesis 2, is based on the ego psychological theories about separation. A mother who has experienced frequent and regular physical separation from her child will have developed coping mechanisms to deal with them. She will therefore feel less distress upon entering her child in school because the change in her own life will be minimal. She may, for example, be dropping her child off at school instead of at a babysitter's on her way to work.

This hypothesis was tested by asking questions about the mother's previous separations from her child: their frequency, duration, and regularity. Responses on questions about previous separations (the independent variable) were then compared to the mothers difficulty separating (the dependent variable).

Hypothesis 7: Hypothesis 7 states that the mother's general morale and confidence level relate to the degree of difficulty she has with physical separation. A mother who is depressed about leaving her child in school may have become depressed because of this separation, or may have been depressed for a long time with the depression coming from other causes. In other words, is the depression "situation-specific?"

Questions were asked about the state of the mother's overall feelings in order to ferret out the important distinctions.

Hypothesis 8: Does a mother's age relate to her response to separation?

This question is based on much current literature which states that younger mothers are in general less child-oriented than older mothers.

A mother's age was determined and then compared to the degree of difficulty she has separating.

Hypothesis 9: Hypothesis 9 states that a mother's socioeconomic status relates to her response to separation.

Social work has long been interested in the difference in attitudes and behavior resulting from different socioeconomic status; hence the inclusion of this important dimension of analysis.

Hypothesis 10: Hypothesis 10 states that a mother's ethnic background relates to her response to separation.

It has been widely noted in the literature that cultural orientation has a strong impact on child-rearing attitudes and behavior. Day care has a multi-racial population, which provides an ideal opportunity for an examination of this issue in relation to mothers' separation.

Hypothesis 11: Hypothesis 11 states that mother's religion relates to her response to separation.

Questionnaire Construction

Questionnaires were chosen as the means of data collection. They are flexible enough to capture details, while allowing for a larger sample size than would be possible with individual interviews. They can tap both feelings and context. Probes were used to clarify contradictions.

A questionnaire was constructed to collect data about the following areas, each one representative of a hypothesis.

1. The separation experience itself: Did the mother find it difficult? What did she do on the first day? How did she feel?
2. The mothers' views of the level of independence she thinks her child has attained. Does she see him as an extension of herself, or as a separate individual? Does she see her child as having needs different from her own? Has she recognized that going to school might be a difficult transition for him?
3. The extent of the mother's social network: Does she have a supportive family, friends, a sympathetic husband, etc.
4. The previous separations: Has the mother spent time away from her child before? Regularly or irregularly? For how long?
5. Attitude toward the school: Does the mother feel the school is supportive, helpful, caring?
6. General morale and confidence level: How does the mother's response to separation compare to her general mood? Is she depressed, not just about leaving her child but about everything else?
7. Demographics, including age, socioeconomic status, employment, family composition, and ethnic and religious background.

Some of the variables above had factual answers, and therefore could be answered by a single question. A mother's age is one example. Other variables, however, called for feelings and attitudes. In these instances, several questions on the same subject were included, and answers were later joined to form composites. For example, the numerical score indicating a mother's level of general morale is based on her responses to 7 questions. The purpose of including several questions on the same subject was to improve the validity of the responses.

Many questions were behaviorally oriented, to reduce inference and also to allow for the variable to be operationalized in several different ways.

Each question was constructed along the following guidelines, described by Eugene Babbie. The items were short and clear, avoiding negatives and complex sentence structure. Some were open-ended and some closed-ended. Answer categories for the closed-ended questions were exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Instructions indicated that the one best answer should be selected. Questions were relevant to the respondent in that they related to her experience, past and present. Biased questions were avoided, enabling the respondent to choose any answer comfortably. The answers available encompassed the full range of the variable. For example, a mother could describe her separation reaction anywhere along a range from very easy to very hard.

The format of the questionnaire was spread out and uncluttered to aid legibility. Questions were arranged in a logical sequence

with the possible effect of previous questions kept in mind. An opening paragraph introduced the questionnaire and explained its purposes. In addition, each set of questions was given its own small introduction.

The tone of the questionnaire was non-threatening and understanding. The tone was established both in the introductory remarks and in the questions themselves.

The reliability of the questionnaire was considered in several ways. The questionnaire utilizes as many items as possible from previously used sources. The questionnaire was also checked by several professionals knowledgeable about its theoretical background, its aims and its purposes. It was found to be theoretically correct. This is particularly important as both social networks and ego psychology are new areas of study.

The entire questionnaire was then pretested on mothers of 3 and 4 year olds to ferret out complications and confusions. Several suggestions were offered and the questionnaire was amended accordingly, and then distributed to the study population. The instrument was precoded and later unclear responses were deciphered according to a codebook.

Operationalizing the Variables

The questionnaire consisted of 220 questions, some quantitative and some qualitative. The quantitative questions were prepared for statistical analysis. The questionnaire had been constructed in such a way that many of the quantitative questions covered the same material but from slightly different angles.

Questions which had conceptual unity were grouped and tested for statistical reliability. The criteria used in determining what was an acceptable level of reliability was that determined by J.C. Nunnally in Psychometric Theory. He states that

What a satisfactory level of reliability is depends on how a measure is being used. In the early stages of research on predictor tests or hypothesized measures of a construct, one saves time and energy by working with instruments that have only modest reliability, for which purpose reliabilities of .60 or .50 will suffice.

Once the reliability coefficients had been compiled, with the order of the answers reversed if necessary, those units which showed high reliability coefficients were maintained as composites. The purpose of this data reduction technique was two-fold. Firstly, it enabled the researcher to use a smaller number of measures and therefore to summarize more efficiently and secondly, it improved the reliability and validity of the study by tapping a given attitude from more than one dimension and then combining the answers.

Those units which lacked an acceptable reliability coefficient were examined to see how the reliability coefficient could be improved. On some occasions, it was necessary to delete a variable from the composite, and then retest the composite for reliability. On other

occasions it was necessary to treat items separately and not try to combine them. The rationale for these decisions is explained in the description of the treatment of each variable.

Once the reliability coefficients for all the composites were acceptable, the variables were tested for linearity to make sure that a high score on one variable meant a high score on another. All the tests for linearity were met, and the analysis could proceed.

In all instances, when the variable "difficulty separating" was analyzed in conjunction with other major variables as well as the minor variables, the distribution of the cases didn't allow for 2-way interactions. However, once the minor variables which were insignificant were removed from the analysis, one interaction emerged. This was between the categories of social network and separate, and will be discussed in greater detail later.

Difficulty Separating

The dependent variable, difficulty separating, was a composite of three separate scores. The first score was taken directly from the question about "how hard" it was to leave your child at school. Answers fell along a continuum of 1 to 5.

The second and third scores come from a list of adjectives describing feelings at the time of separation. The list was developed by Shirley Jenkins and Elaine Norman and was used to determine the feeling states experienced by mothers at separation time. Adjectives on the list were "free, happy, relieved, sad, worried, guilty, and lonely." Mothers described their feelings along a continuum in the

present study. The reliability of the composite score of all these variables as estimated by Cronbachs alpha was .74.

Although the list of adjectives was originally conceived and treated as a single unit, as an additional statistical precaution in this study, the list was divided into two separate lists, one for those adjectives which expressed positive emotions (free, happy, relieved) and the other for those adjectives which expressed more troubled emotions, (sad, worried, guilty, lonely). The reliability coefficient for the first group was .66, and for the second group it was .75. When both these composites were considered in combination with the score from the "how hard" question, the reliability coefficient was .79. The decision was made to treat the three scores as one, as the reliability coefficient was high enough, and the combination of the three items gave stability and strength to the major variable. Together they covered a broader range conceptually while also forming a reliable statistical unit. See Table 3-16.

Interdependence

The second hypothesis states that the extent to which a mother experiences difficulty upon separation from the child at school entrance is a function of her views of the level of independence she thinks exists between her child and herself.

Items in the questionnaire relating to this hypothesis were divided into three groups. The first tested the mother's views of her own dependence on the child. The second group of questions tested the mother's views about her child's ability to function independently.

TABLE 3-16

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF SEPARATION COMPONENTS

Separation

1

Sad
Happy
Worried
Relieved
Guilty
Lonely
Free

Alpha = .73

Separation

1A

Free
Happy
Relieved

Alpha = .66

Separation

1B

Sad
Worried
Guilty
Lonely

Alpha = .75

"Difficulty
Separating"

Hard school
Separation 1A
Separation 1B

Alpha = .79

66

The third group tested the mother's perception of her child's level of differentiation from herself. The reliability of these three groups was .24 and it was therefore decided not to combine them at this point.

Reliability analyses were then performed on each of the groups of items separately. The first group (called Dependent "A", for adults) had a Cronbach Alpha of .23. To improve this reliability, the group was broken into two smaller subgroups each of which was conceptually unified. The first subgroup (Dependent "A₁") consisted of two items relating to early mothering experience. The reliability coefficient of this unit was .56.

The second subgroup (Dependent "A₂") consisted of 3 items relating to the mother's perceived control over her child. The Cronbach Alpha of this composite was .49. When the one item which lowered the reliability was removed ("solve") the remaining composite had a reliability coefficient of .53.

The second group of items (Dependent "C" for child) had a reliability coefficient of .52, and was maintained as a composite because there was no one component which stood out as lowering the reliability.

The third group of items, (differentiation), consisted of an adjective checklist of twenty items. The point of the list was to give a total score, the derivation of which will be described later. This list was not compiled with internal consistency in mind, but it was decided nevertheless to run a reliability analysis. The Cronbach Alpha was surprisingly high (.62) given the purpose of the list and

it appeared that with one small alteration it could be even higher. This consisted of deleting the four items with the lowest scores (11, 12, 15, 20). The reliability analysis with the reduced list was run again, and, surprisingly, the Alpha dropped to .60.

The explanation for this was that Alpha isn't only a function of the intercorrelation of items but also of the number of items. The four deleted items were apparently only marginally hampering the reliability.

It was decided to restore the four items to the list, and use it as a whole.

The scoring system for the adjective checklist was developed by Dr. Lloyd Silverman (see Literature Review). It consisted of giving the adjective checklist to one person who is first told to describe himself or herself according to the items on the list. The person is then told to think of another person and describe him/her according to the same list. In this instance, mothers were asked to first describe themselves, and then their children according to the adjective given.

On each given item then, there would then be a mother score and a child score. The child's score was subtracted from the mother's score for each of the 20 items. The differences were then totalled. The greater the difference in the answers to each item, i.e., the (M-C) score, in either direction, the greater the mother-child differentiation. When a case was missing on a component item, the item was assigned the mean of variable for those cases which did have scores. In this way, the number of cases to be considered remained large (142).

TABLE 3-17

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENCE COMPOSITES

Variable Name	Computer Name	Cronbach Alpha	Key Words
<u>Items treated together</u>			
Early mothering experience	Dependent A	.24	home, enjoy, tantrum, obey solve
Child's Independence	Dependent C		
Mother-child differentiation	Differentiation		checklist of 20
<u>Items treated singly</u>			
Early mothering experience	Dependent A ₁	.56	home, enjoy
Perceived control a	Dependent A ₂ (3 items)	.48	tantrum, obey, solve
b	Dependent A ₂ (2 items)	.52	tantrum, obey
Mother-child differentiation	Differentiation	.62	checklist of 20
	Differentiation, reduced	.60	checklist of 16
<u>Items treated together in new composite form</u>			
Overall independence	Dependent A ₁ Dependent A ₂ Dependent C Differentiation	.07	as above

67

At this point, once acceptable reliability coefficients for the individual composite variables had been computed, it was decided again to combine all groups into one large one. The four component items (Depend "A₁", "Depend "A₂", Depend "C" and Differentiation) were very poorly related and their average interrelation was .07. It was decided to treat each of the four composite variables separately in the analyses.

Only one step still remained before the two different analyses could be run. The categories of each of the four composite variables had to be collapsed into two groups, creating a "high" and "low" categories. This done, the analyses could proceed.

Social Network

From among the 14 questions pertaining to a mother's social network, four clearly distinct conceptual units could be constructed. The units described a mother's relationship to her 1) husband, 2) parents, 3) relatives, and 4) friends. The average intercorrelation of the questions pertaining to the husband was .94, to the parents, .78, to the relatives, .70, and to the friends, .50. While the first 3 units were strongly interrelated, the fourth (friends) consisted of items whose relationships were only barely acceptable. An additional problem with the composite "friends" was that the distribution of the cases was very uneven, with the bulk of the cases falling into one category. It seemed that the questions did not measure well.

At this point, the question of whether to create a general large category which would summarize social network information or

to maintain four smaller specific categories was raised. There is extensive literature in the field of sociology on social networks, however, there is no one rationale for combining the components of a social network. In fact, say David Kroke and James Kuklinski in Network Analyses "...Researchers capacities to conceptualize and operationalize various types of networks are almost unlimited." Certainly, they go on to say, some types of relational content are more common than others. Network analyses of kinship and descent relationships or of role relationships among family, for example, are studied frequently. However, it is clear that network analyses take on many forms to suit the purposes of the researcher.

In this study, the researcher was interested in the amount of ^{VR.} social contact of the respondents taken as a whole. A respondent's ^{quality} connections to her husband, parents, relatives, and friends were seen as different instances of the same phenomenon, namely, how connected the respondent was to others socially. The researcher was interested not in the object of the contact, but in the amount of contact.

For this reason, it was decided to combine the social network component items into one unit which would summarize the relational context of the respondent's life.

A reliability analysis was computed to determine the average intercorrelation of the four composites (husband, parents, relatives, and friends). The reliability coefficient was quite low, at .42. "Friends" seemed to have little relation to Husband, Parents, and Relatives, so it was deleted and the reliability analysis run again. This time, the Alpha went up to .49. These three composites then were

treated singly as the composite "Social Network", and the smaller composite "friends" was treated separately.

TABLE III-18

RELIABILITY ANALYSES FOR THE SOCIAL NETWORK COMPOSITES

Social Network Composite: Husband	Alpha = .94
1. how much agreement	
2. how get along	
3. how much interest	
 Social Network Composite: Parents	 Alpha = .78
1. how is getting together	
2. how personal	
3. how much support	
 Social Network Composite: Relatives	 Alpha = .70
1. how many in contact	
2. how often talk	
3. how much help	
 Social Network Composite: Friends	 Alpha = .50
1. how many	
2. how close	
3. how much help	
 Social Network Composite: Husband + Parents + Relatives + Friends	 Alpha = .42
 Social Network Composite: Husband + Parents + Relatives	 Alpha = .49

Coping Mechanisms

An additional section on the coping mechanisms mothers have developed to deal with their difficulty separating was given to the "experienced" mothers. The purpose of this section was to elicit information on what the mothers have done since initial separation a year ago, and how their activities have effected their relationships with their children. Although there were five questions in this section, only two were used for statistical analysis. The other three were used to provide a more qualitative account of post-separation experiences, and will be described later.

The two main questions on coping mechanisms were 1) "Have you activities changed since you enrolled your child in school?" and 2) "Has your relationship with your child improved in any way"? Whereas throughout the rest of the study, the variable "difficulty separating" was the dependent variable, in this hypothesis, these two items, treated independently, were considered to be the dependent variables. The reason for this was that the development of coping mechanisms of necessity postdates the separation experience.

Each of the new dependent variables was analyzed in conjunction with 6 predictor variables. Results indicated that several of the predictors contributed significantly towards explaining the variation in the dependent variables. This will be discussed further in the section describing the findings.

Attitudes Toward School

The majority of variables describing a mother's attitudes toward school were qualitative and descriptive. Those which were

quantitative were not useable in a statistical analysis, because the distribution of cases among the cells was so uneven. There was not enough variance to perform an analysis.

Previous Separation Experience

A composite was made of 5 items from the questionnaire pertaining to the amount of separation a given mother-child pair had experienced prior to school entrance.

The five items asked about how old the child was when the mother first began spending a half-day or more apart from him or her, how much time was spent apart, how long, how long the separations were (a whole day or a half day), how frequently they were, and finally, if there were any separations of a week or longer.

The reliability coefficient as estimated by Cronbach's Alpha for these five items was .68.

The item which lowered the reliability the most was pertaining to the separations of a week or longer. When it was deleted from the composite, the Cronbach Alpha was slightly higher.

Although these items did make a moderately reliable statistical unit, as a conceptual unit they were fairly unwieldy. For example, the separation experience of a mother who left her child for a few hours with some one else every day was qualitatively different from a mother who left her child for the whole day every day.

It was decided for these reasons to use only the responses to the question about leaving for part of the day in the analysis.

Response categories, originally six in number, were collapsed into two categories, so that there was a high and a low score on the

amount of previous separation. Response category 1 and 2 were combined, and response categories 5 and 6 were combined. The middle two categories wherein the mother said that she left her child for two or three half days a weeks were deleted from consideration in the analysis as they represented middle range answers which could not justly be considered in either the low or high category. The number of cases used in the analysis was 111.

General Morale

The variable "general morale" is a composite of all seven items included in section V of the questionnaire. The section, when viewed as a whole, describes a given mother's outlook and approach toward life. Is she generally satisfied, interested in her daily life, happy with her decisions, and optimistic about the future? The reliability coefficient of all these items when combined, was .73, a number sufficiently high to comfortably justify treating the 7 items as one statistical unit.

Social Class

Each mother was designated to one of five social classes. The choice of social class was based on a score derived from The Two Factor Index of Social Position, developed by Hollingshead and Redlich. The two factors considered were occupation and education. Scores ranged from 1 to 5, with a low score indicating an upper class position. The mother's level of education and the occupational role she has in society were each multiplied by a factor weight previously determined by multiple regression techniques.

The social class score was used in the multiple regression analysis where it was treated as a confounding or antecedent variable. See the table in the section on demographics for a frequency distribution of the scores.

Age

The information used in the statistical analysis concerning a mother's age was taken directly from the item on the questionnaire relating to that topic. The variable was considered to be confounding one and therefore was treated as an independent variable in the multiple regression analysis.

Information on the range of ages of the women in the study population can be found in the section describing the demographics of the study population.

Ethnic Group, Religion, and Length of Employment

Information pertaining to these variables was also drawn directly from the responses on the questionnaire. However, the distribution of the responses among the cells of these variables was very uneven. Under ethnic group, for example, "White" was overwhelmingly predominant, while under religion, "Jewish" predominated. The sample size of the other categories was too small to keep them separate. To counteract these imbalances, several cells in each of the above variables were collapsed, and the responses were recorded into two groups. The new categories formed under religion were "Jewish" and "Non-Jewish", and the new categories formed under ethnic

group were "White" and "Non-White". Responses to the question about length of employment were recoded into two categories, "employed for less than six months" and "employed for more than six months." The results of this recoding process can be seen in the tables in the section on demographics.

Number of Children

A table showing the number of children in each family can be found in the section pertaining to demographics. For purposes of the analysis, a pregnancy was counted as a child, in recognition of the impact that planning and preparing for another child has on a pre-existing mother-child relationship.

The study was not as concerned, however, with the relationship between the exact number of children and the major variables as it was with relationship between an increasing number of children and increasing separation difficulty. This distinction may seem like hair-splitting, but it made a difference in terms of the instructions given to the computer. The computer was asked to treat the variable as continuous, i.e., to find out whether having more children relative to having less children was associated with a higher score on difficulty separating.

The variable pertaining to the number of children was treated as an independent variable. Its relationship to all the minor variables was taken into account in examining its relationship to the major variables.

TABLE 3-19

OPERATIONALIZATION AND RESPONSE CATEGORIES OF
MAJOR AND MINOR STUDY VARIABLES

Variables	Response Categories
Major dependent variable	
Difficulty Separating	5 categories, from very hard to very easy
Minor dependent variable	
Coping Mechanisms	Change in activities: yes or no Improvement in relationship with child: yes or no
Independent variables	
Level of Experience	2 categories 1. Inexperienced 2. Experienced
Degree of independence	
4 separate groups:	
Perceived control	5 categories, from not at all to very much
Early mothering experience	5 categories, from not at all to very much
View of child's independence	5 categories, from never to always
Differentiation	Adjective checklist; 5 categories from "not at all" to "very"
Social Network	5 categories, from very isolated to well supported
Attitude towards school	
Did teacher give enough time	2 categories, yes or no
Previous separation experience	
Leave part-time	2 categories from 1) never or one half day a week to 2) 4 or 5 half days a week

TABLE 3-19 (cont'd)

Variable	Response Categories
General morale	5 categories, from satisfied and happy to depressed and bored
Age	4 categories
Social Class	5 categories, from Class I to Class V
Ethnic Group	2 categories: White and Non-White
Religion	2 categories: Jewish and Non-Jewish
Length of Employment	2 categories: 1. Less than 6 months 2. More than 6 months
Number of Children	One or more, treated continuously

Logic of the Analysis

The focus of the study is the nature of mothers' reactions to separation from their children at school entrance. Six major and seven minor variables were hypothesized to be related to difficulty with separation. Major variables were degree of independence, strength of social network, level of experience, coping mechanisms, attitude towards school, and previous separation experience. Minor variables were age, general morale, social class, ethnicity, religion, employment, and number of children.

Two methods of statistical analysis were used to study the relationship between the dependent variable (separation reaction) and the independent variables. The methods, multiple regression analysis and analysis of variance, were chosen for their ability to handle multiple variables, and to describe the relative importance of each to a dependent variable.

Two groups of data were collected. A multiple regression analysis was first performed to compare the two groups of data and how they related to a third variable while still controlling for independent or predictor variables. Where none of the predictors were significant, they were excluded from the anova in order to preserve degrees of freedom. This made the anova more powerful.

The analysis of variance was then performed, to ascertain the relationship between the dependent variable and each of the major independent variables. In this way, the influence which the independent variables might have had on the major variables was filtered out.

Once the anova was performed, adjusted mean scores for each group of data were derived and compared. The central questions

asked were 1) Is there a difference between the adjusted mean scores of the variables considered, and 2) if so, was that difference "real" or attributable to chance. In other words, was the difference between the means statistically significant? The null hypothesis stated that there was no relationship between the variables. Information drawn from the regression analysis and the analysis of variance would be used to either reject or not reject the null hypothesis. If the null hypothesis was rejected, the inference would be that treatment effects were operating on the data.

The variables age, general morale, social class, ethnic group, religion, length of employment, and number of children were included in the analysis for two reasons. The first was that their relationship to the main variable, difficulty separating, was of interest in and of itself. The reasons for this are explained in the section describing the hypotheses. An attempt was therefore made to determine whether or not any of them related significantly to the major dependent variable. To answer this statistical question, the variables were considered jointly in a multiple regression analysis. The reason they were treated concurrently was that it was considered fallacious to examine the relationship of one of them to the dependent variable without knowing of the possible contribution of the others. To do so would be to ignore the complexity of the dependent variable.

The second purpose of including the above mentioned variables in the study was to use them as controls on the main variables. It was possible that they might confound or obscure the main

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relationship under study. Once the multiple regression analysis had determined what their contribution in explaining the variation in the dependent variables was, their effect could be taken into account and the analysis of variance could be undertaken with full confidence that the relationships of the main independent variables to the dependent variable were "purged" of any confounding with the independent variables.

The analysis of variance yielded tables of means and levels of significance. Where the relationships between the variables had been predicted in a certain way, the numbers indicating the levels of significance on the computer could be divided by two, as the computer gives a "two-tailed" result.

The number of questionnaires which were processed was 177. Although 181 questionnaires were returned, four were in Spanish and were not considered in the analysis as they did not form a group of sufficient size.

CHAPTER IV
REPORT OF FINDINGS

Hypothesis 1

In the analysis of the first hypothesis, the effect of experience on difficulty separating was examined. The hypothesis stated that the reactions to separation change over time and will be most intense at the initial separation (i.e., when mothers first enter their children in school), before mothers have had time to adjust and find adequate coping mechanisms.

The variables measuring "difficulty separating" and the variable "experience with separation" were compared.

As described in the section on operationalizing the variables, the variable "difficulty separating" was a composite of three items. Although the composite was used throughout the analysis, it is of interest to note the frequency distribution of one of the items as a preliminary step before discussing the findings. The item is "How hard was it for you to put your child in school?" The responses to this item were tabulated according to whether the mothers were "inexperienced" with separation, (i.e., they were just entering their children into school) or whether they were "experienced" with separation, (i.e., their children had been in school for 6 months or more).

Of the 81 "inexperienced" mothers, 44 found separation hard and 37

found separation easy. Of the 95 "experienced" mothers, 16 found separation hard, 79 found it easy. The range in the dependent variable, even though it is not here in its composite form, is readily apparent. See Table 1.

TABLE IV 1
RELATION BETWEEN "LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE" AND
HOW HARD WAS SEPARATION

		Level of Experience				
		Inexperience		Experience		
		N	%	N	%	
How hard was Separating	Hard	(44)	54	(16)	17	(60)
	Easy	(37) (81)	46	(79) (95)	83	(116)

The frequency distribution of the composite "difficulty separating," the main dependent variable, also had a broad range. Of the 78 "inexperienced" mothers, 55 found separation hard and 23 found it easy. Of the "experienced" mothers, 38 found it hard and 55 found it easy. See Table 2.

TABLE IV 2
RELATION BETWEEN "DIFFICULTY SEPARATING" AND
"LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE"

		Level of Experience					
Difficulty Separating		<u>Inexperience</u>		<u>Experience</u>			
		<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>		
	Hard	(55)	71	(38)	41	(93)	54.4
	Easy	(23)	29	(55)	59		
		(78)	45.6	(93)	54.4	(78)	45.6

TABLE IV 3
Responses to Variable "Difficulty Separating"

<u>Difficulty Separating</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Absolute Frequency</u>	<u>Adjusted Frequency (%)</u>
Very hard	3	1	.6
	4	1	.6
	5	4	2.3
Hard	6	1	.6
	7	4	2.3
	8	4	2.3
A bit hard	9	11	6.4
	10	20	11.6
	11	28	16.3
Easy	12	20	11.6
	13	30	17.4
Very easy	14	29	16.9
	15	19	11.0
	missing	5	
		177	100.0

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The central question asked in this hypothesis was "How much of a difference is there between experienced scores on "difficulty separating." The results of the anova indicated that the hypothesis was clearly confirmed. There was a highly significant difference between the separation reactions of the inexperienced mothers and the experienced mothers. Scores had a possible range from 3 to 15. The frequency distribution for the scores can be seen in Table 3. The grand mean was 11.78. The separation score for the inexperienced mothers was 10.68 and the separation score for the experienced mothers was 12.70. A lower score indicated a greater difficulty separating. This two-point difference proved to be highly significant.

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The Multiple R Squared was .168, indicating that 16.8 percent of the variance in "difficulty separating" was explained by the level of experience. This was a strong finding in the field of the social sciences, where measures are "soft."

The difference between the means of the two groups of mothers proved to be not only significant, but in the predicted direction, namely, that separation became easier over time. The inexperienced mothers clearly had greater anxiety about separation.

TABLE IV-4

ANOVA FOR THE EFFECTS OF LEVEL OF
EXPERIENCE ON DIFFICULTY SEPARATING

Source	df	Mean Squared	F	P
First	1	172.998	34	.000

The two variables means were also tabulated in an anova where the influence of the variables age, social class, general morale, etc., was considered. None of the predictors had a significant relationship to the major dependent variable, "difficulty separating." However, the very solid difference between the means of the scores of "level of experience" remained highly significant not only here, but throughout the entire analysis.

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In considering the meaning of this finding several possible explanations come to mind. One alternative is that the age of the mothers is a factor. There is a year's difference between the experienced and the inexperienced mothers. Perhaps this year was significant in terms of the maturity of the mothers. This possibility is not a likelihood, however, because the age was a predictor variable in the multiple regression analysis, and found to be insignificant.

One alternative is that the age of the children is a factor. A years difference in a young child can mean an enormous difference in terms of the child's level of independence. Perhaps the mothers of the older children were less anxious as their children were so much more self-sufficient. This important question deserves a thorough examination of its own, which it receives in the discussion of the findings of Hypothesis 2.

Yet another alternative explanation for the finding that experienced mothers are less anxious about separating than inexperienced mothers is that the experienced mothers, having become a part of the school system, have taken on the particular role expectations that a school maintains for its parents. The mothers have been taught, through the behavior of teachers, director, and experienced parents, what is considered to be appropriate separation behavior, and, through peer pressures, they have begun to conform to the social norm.

The fourth explanation is that the experienced mothers have become, after a year's worth of separation, very familiar with the phenomenon. Their children may still be dependent on them, but, through practice,

they have learned not to worry about them. Hypothesis 5, discussed later, compares a mother's difficulty separating with the amount of separation experienced prior to school entrance, and finds significant differences in the difficulty with separation between the mothers who were frequently apart and those who were rarely apart. This finding corroborates the explanation that practice makes separation easier.

This finding is consistent with the assumptions about separation which underlie the work of both John Bowlby and the ego psychologists. (See Review of the Literature) The assumptions state that separation reactions change over time, that separation becomes easier as each mother-child pair becomes more habituated to it, and that growth and development move in the direction of ever increasing independence between mother and child. The very clear differences between the experienced mothers and the inexperienced mothers, in terms of their ability to tolerate separation, provides a specific concrete example of the broader theoretical trends.

The difficulty observable in the inexperienced mothers in dealing with separation has implications for practice. The first is that, given the clear discrepancy between the experienced and inexperienced mothers to deal with separation, a method be found for the experienced mothers to help the inexperienced mothers. A big sister program would be one way to facilitate this helping process.

A second way in which social workers could help parents with separation is to educate teachers. Social workers can help teachers become both more sensitive to parents and more familiar with the theory

about separation. This would help them recognize the importance of trying to promote smoothly separating mother-child pairs.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 states that reactions to separation change according to the mother's view of her relationship with her child. A mother who sees her child as a separate individual will have less difficulty at parting than a mother who sees her child as an extension of herself.

The hypothesis was operationalized by grouping the items into four different categories and comparing each one with a mother's score on "difficulty separating." (See section on operationalizing the variables.)

In each comparison, the two main variables of interest were first compared jointly with all the predictor variables. Where the predictors were found to be insignificant, the two main variables of interest were then compared in an analysis of variance.

The first category was called "early mothering experience." The

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items in this category asked the respondent to describe how much she enjoyed the early period when her child was very dependent on her. The scores were then compared to the scores on "difficulty separating." The findings were that the separation scores of the mothers who enjoyed the early dependency were significantly different from those who did not. The significance was .036 and the Multiple R Squared was .198. This indicated that "early mothering experience" together with "level of experience" accounted for 19.8 percent of the variation in the variable "difficulty separating."

TABLE IV-5

ANOVA OF EFFECTS OF EARLY MOTHERING
EXPERIENCE (A) AND LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE (B)
ON DIFFICULTY SEPARATING

Source	DF	Mean Square	F	P
Main Effects				
A	2	13.22	2.63	.075*
B	2	183.12	36.44	.000
Two-Way Interactions				
A B	2	3.44	.685	.505

*Indicates a two-tailed result to be divided by two where the hypothesis was one-tailed.

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The group of respondents with the lowest scores consisted of 26 people. The mean separation score, wherein a low score means more difficulty separating, was 10.84. This group of mothers enjoyed the dependency immensely. The mean for the middle range group, numbering 88, was 12.01, and the mean for the high group, numbering 53, was 11.77. These mothers did not enjoy the early mothering experience. The difference between the low and medium scores is a full 1.16. The difference between the medium and high scores is .34, less than a half a point, and in the opposite direction. This indicates a slight reversal. However, in the context of the overall pattern, the reversal seems insignificant, and may well be due to chance fluctuation.

TABLE IV-6

MEAN SCORES OF EARLY MOTHERING EXPERIENCE AND
LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE ON DIFFICULTY SEPARATING

Grand Mean = 11.77		Adjusted Mean
Variable and Category	N	
Early Mothering Experience		
Low	26	10.84
Medium	88	12.01
High	53	11.67
Level of Experience		
Inexperience	76	10.59
Experience	91	12.75

Nevertheless, the entire pattern of the responses indicates that mothers who felt very intense reactions to the early mothering experience, be it either strong liking or strong dislike, had a more difficult time adjusting to separation than mothers who had only moderately pleasurable early mothering experiences.

To be more specific, the mothers who very much enjoyed staying home with their children had a very difficult time separating from them at school entrance.

It could be stated that these mothers had more difficulty adapting themselves to their children's changing needs. They may have been more comfortable with their child's early needs for dependence than their child's growing needs for independence. They may have found then the act of separating to be more difficult.

The second group of mothers enjoyed their early mothering experience to only a moderate degree and found the separation at school entrance to be quite easy. These mothers may represent the well adjusted mothers. They were able to recognize ambivalent feelings. They were able to tolerate the excessive demands of the infant and toddler and still derive some satisfaction from the experience. They were also comfortable, it seems, with the child's growing ability to function without them. They could welcome the separation at school entrance.

The third group of mothers, those with "high" scores, strongly disliked the early mothering experience, but nevertheless found it somewhat difficult to separate. It could be concluded that these mothers had much more difficulty adapting. They might have been

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dissatisfied with their children's extreme dependence on them, but then also may have had difficulty letting them go when the time came.

A second composite variable compared to "difficulty separating" in Hypothesis 2 was a mother's "perceived control" over her child.

"Perceived control" was divided into three response categories, and interestingly, there was considerable range among the answers. There were 42 mothers who felt they had great difficulty disciplining their children, 95 who felt they had some difficulty, and 30 who felt that they had good control over their children.

The results of comparing the scores of these three response categories to "difficulty separating" however, yielded no significant differences among the categories. The mean separation score of the mothers with great difficulty disciplining was 12.03. The mean score of the mothers who had some difficulty disciplining was 11.67, and the mean score of the mothers who had no difficulty disciplining was 12.01.

The Multiple R Squared was .181.

See Table 7.

TABLE IV-7
MEAN SCORES OF PERCEIVED CONTROL AND
LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE ON DIFFICULTY SEPARATING

Grand Mean = 11.82		
Variable and Category	N	Adjusted Mean
Perceived Control		
Low (no control)	42	12.03
Medium	95	11.67
High (good control)	30	12.01
Level of Experience		
Inexperience	77	10.70
Experience	90	12.78

Implicit in the hypothesis was the idea that a mother who saw her child as an independent being rather than as an extension of herself would be more able to discipline appropriately. Such a mother would also be able to tolerate separation.

This finding, however, indicates that there is no relationship between a mother's ability to discipline her child and her ability to tolerate separation.

The third composite variable compared to "difficulty separating" in Hypothesis 2 was "mother's view of child's level of independence." Findings were that the variations in the mothers views of her child's independence correlated significantly with her difficulty separating. The measure of the significance was .027. The Multiple R squared was .200.

Scores on the mothers view of her child's independence were divided into three response categories, with a low score indicating extreme dependency and a high score indicating strong independence. The 35 mothers who saw their children as extremely dependent had a separation score of 11.04. The 111 mothers who saw their children as moving comfortably towards independence had a separation score of 11.94, almost a one point difference. The 20 mothers who viewed their children as highly independent were able to separate from them very easily. Their mean score on separation was 12.53, the highest score of all.

TABLE IV-8

MEAN SCORES OF VIEW OF CHILD'S INDEPENDENCE AND
LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE ON DIFFICULTY SEPARATING

Grand Mean = 11.81		
Variable and Category	N	Adjusted Means
View of Child's Independence		
Low (very dependent)	35	11.04
Medium	111	11.92
High (very independent)	20	12.53
Level of Experience		
Inexperience	74	10.73
Experience	92	12.56

The correlation between a mother's view of the level of her child's independence and her difficulty separating from that child was clearly established as significant and in the predicted direction, namely, that the mother who was able to recognize her child's ability to function without her was more able to tolerate separation from that child. The mothers who could assess the ability of a three- or four-year-old realistically could feel comfortable leaving him or her, knowing the child could manage. But a mother who saw her child as unable to function well independently would continue to help the child and thus foster the very dependence she was so worried about.

TABLE IV-9

ANOVA OF THE EFFECTS OF VIEW OF CHILD'S INDEPENDENCE (A)
AND LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE (B) ON DIFFICULTY SEPARATING

Source	DF	Mean Square	F	P
Main Effects				
A	2	14.020	2.959	.055*
B	1	98.507	20.787	.000
Two-way Interactions				
A B	2	11.06	2.197	.114

*Indicates a two-tailed result to be divided by two where the hypothesis was one-tailed.

It is interesting here to note the action-reaction-action cycle that exists between mother and child. If a child is more independent, the mother in turn, can be more easily convinced that he can manage without her. Likewise, if a mother has confidence that her child can adjust to the classroom, that attitude will influence the child.

A two-way street exists here, and it becomes clear that social workers can intervene from either direction. They can help the mothers or the children or both. Social workers can help the mothers by building up a supportive network within the school - a practice approach discussed elsewhere in this discussion. And social workers can intervene from the child side of the mother-child dyad. One possible way would be to prepare the child for separation by teaching him specific competency skills, since it appears in this study that the more independent the child is, the easier the separation. Yet this study does not make a distinction among different forms of independence. The questions measuring the child's independence assess independence in several areas. The child could be very competent socially, and feel comfortable entering a group of children, but yet have very few of, for lack of a better term, instrumental skills, and be unable to deal with the world on a practical level. Although certainly both areas are important, is strength in one area more critical? Further research would be very useful here.

In Hypothesis 2, the fourth composite variable compared to "difficulty separating" is "mother-child differentiation." Here, although the findings were not significant, they were in the predicted direction.

Scores on "mother-child differentiation" were put into two groups, divided at the median. There was very little variation between the two groups. The low group, numbering 26 mothers, had a mean score of 11.36. This group saw very little differentiation between themselves and their children. They found their children to have the exact same attributes as themselves, and to the exact same degree.

The high group, numbering 145, had an average score of 11.86. This group saw more differences between themselves and their children. The difference between the two groups was small (a half a point) but still in the predicted direction. The mothers who saw more differentiation between themselves and their children had an easier time with separation at school entrance (higher scores).

The finding is consistent with the theories of ego psychology. While ego psychology does not specifically deal with the mother's experience with psychological separation, it does suggest that the mother and child are bound in a psychological unit. Both halves of the unit must participate in the separation process.

If the mother's perception of the child as having different attributes from herself is in fact a measure of how far the psychological process of separation has progressed, then the mothers who see more differences are the ones who are further along in the process.

TABLE IV-10
MEAN SCORES OF MOTHER-CHILD DIFFERENTIATION AND
LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE ON DIFFICULTY SEPARATING

Grand Mean = 11.78		
Variable and Category	N	Adjusted Means
Mother-Child Differentiation		
Low (little differentiation)	26	11.36
High (more differentiation)	145	11.86
Level of Experience		
	78	10.68
	93	12.71

One would expect that the initial parting at school entrance would be easier for the mother-child pairs which are further along in that process, and therefore easier for the mothers in those pairs.

It is interesting to note here, however, that this differentiation measure had only minimal success in capturing the differentiation between a mother and her very young child. This is seen in the small amount of variation in the scores.

The scale was originally developed to measure differentiation between adult schizophrenics and their mothers. In this study, however, it was used to measure the differentiation between mothers and their young children. It was found to be less successful as a measure

for the population of this study. A possible explanation for this lies in the nature of the differentiation process itself. The mothers in this study have only recently emerged from the total symbiosis which exists between a mother and her newborn. The mother-child relationship has not had time to mature to a point where differentiation is sufficiently developed to be clearly measured by this particular measure.

Hypothesis 3

In the third hypothesis, the effect of a mother's social network on "difficulty separating" is examined. The hypothesis states that reactions to separation at school entrance will relate to the strength of a mother's social network. The stronger the network, the more the mother will be able to cope with the separation. The more fragile and unsupportive the network, the more difficulty the mother will have adjusting to separation when she first puts her child in school.

Implicit in the hypothesis is the idea that separation will be more difficult for the inexperienced isolated mothers than the experienced isolated mothers.

In the multiple regression analysis, no predictors were significant and no interactions appeared. However, in the anova, where variables which were not significant on prior runs were excluded significant interactions emerged, partially confirming the hypothesis. (See Table IV-11). The relationship between the strength of the social network and the difficulty separating was significantly different for inexperienced and experienced mothers. This indicated that the level of experience

was clearly a basic discriminating variable.

TABLE IV-11

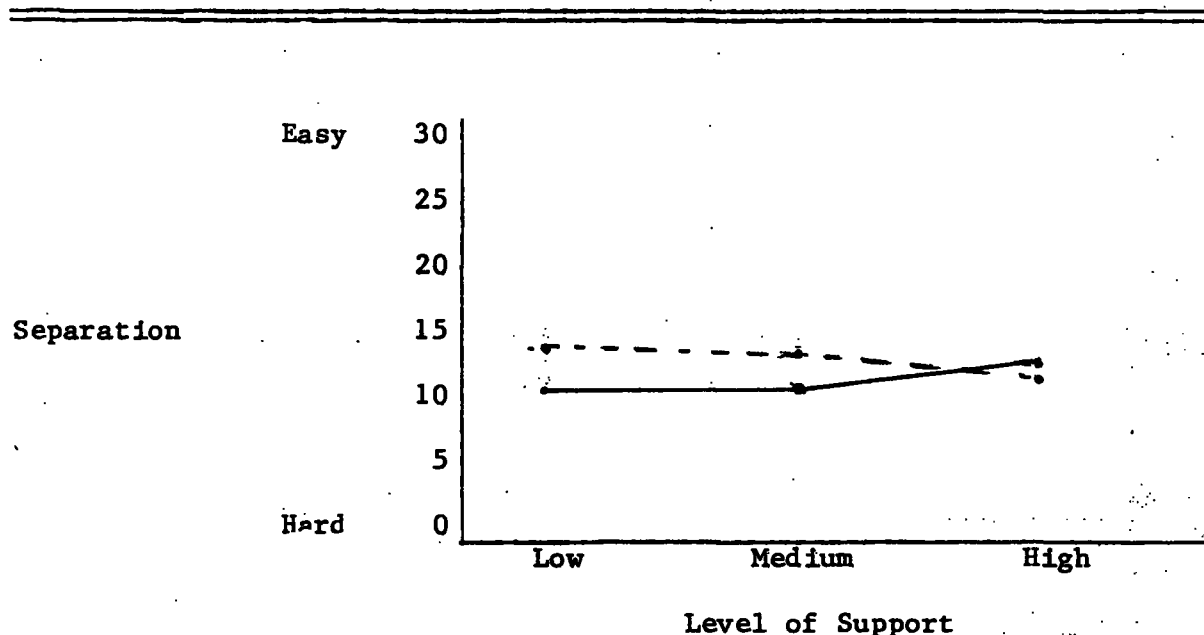
ANOVA OF THE EFFECTS OF "SOCIAL NETWORK" (A) AND
"LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE" (B) ON "DIFFICULTY SEPARATING"

Source	DF	Mean Squared	F	P
Main Effects				
A	2	2.285	.468	.627
B	1	170.900	35.01	.00
Two-Way Interactions				
A B	2	28.82	5.90	.003

In addition, the strength of the social network proved to be a discriminating variable, defining significant differences in the data, especially in relation to the inexperienced mothers. These findings will now be described in more detail.

TABLE IV-12

RELATION BETWEEN LEVEL OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND DIFFICULTY SEPARATING
AS INDICATED BY INEXPERIENCED AND EXPERIENCED MOTHERS



Inexperienced group _____
Experienced group-----

For exact means see
Table IV-13

First, the differences between the inexperienced and the experienced mothers will be described.

Among very isolated women, there was a significant difference in the separation scores between those who had no experience separating and those who had experience. The mean score for the very isolated inexperienced mothers was 10.42. The mean score for the very isolated experienced mothers was 13.02. This 2.60 difference proved to be highly significant. The inexperienced isolated group had a much harder time separating.

Among moderately isolated women, there was a significant difference in the separation scores between those who were experienced with

separation and those inexperienced. The moderately isolated, inexperienced mothers had an average score of 10.21 and the experienced mothers scored 12.78. This 2.57 difference was highly significant.

Among mothers who were not at all isolated but very well supported by their husband, parents, and extended family, there was no significant difference between the separation scores of the experienced and inexperienced mothers.

Thus it can be seen that experience has a tempering influence on separation reactions. The more experienced a mother is, regardless of her relative isolation, the easier the separation from her child.

Other significant and perhaps more important findings related to this hypothesis have to do with the strength of the social network, especially in relation to the inexperienced mothers. Here, significant differences emerged between those who were "low" on support and those who were "high," as well as those who were "medium" on support and those who were "high." The mean separation scores for these three categories from low support to high support, were 10.42, 10.21, and 12.15, with a low score indicating greater difficulty separating. (See Table 13.)

TABLE IV-13

INTERACTION OF "SOCIAL NETWORK," "EXPERIENCE,"
AND "DIFFICULTY SEPARATING"

Means on Separation	Group				
		Inexperience med	Inexperience low	Experience high	Experience med
10.21	Inexperience medium				
10.42	Inexperience low				
11.36	Experience high				
12.15	Inexperience high	*	*		
12.78	Experience medium	*	*		
13.02	Experience low	*	*	*	

*Denotes pairs of groups significantly different at the .05 level.

These scores showed that, for the inexperienced mothers at least, the strength of the mother's social network is a major indicator of the difficulty she will experience separating.

Thus, it can be seen that the inexperienced mothers were in a vulnerable position, wherein the factor of isolation clearly impinged upon their ability to deal with separation.

This finding clearly supports the ecological approach to understanding social interactions, as, in this way of thinking, a "system," such as a family in its relationship to its environment, must be looked

on as a whole, wherein the parts are all related to one another. In this instance, the strength of a mother's social network is clearly related to her relationship to her child, as seen in her difficulty separating from that child.

In the analysis of the experienced mothers, however, a puzzling finding emerged. A significant difference appeared between the categories of support and the categories of difficulty separating, but in the reverse direction. The experienced mothers who were "low" on support, had a much easier time separating (mean score: 13.02), and the ones who were high on support had a harder time separating (mean score: 11.36). In examining this finding, the question was raised as to whether the experienced mothers who were isolated had gone back to work. Perhaps this was the explanation for their current ease of separation. In an analysis of variance, it did emerge that the relationship between the categories of support and the duration of employment for the experienced mothers was linearly related. Among experienced mothers, for example, the isolated ones had held jobs for longer than the well-supported ones. However, the finding was not significant. See Tables IV-14 and IV-15.

According to the categories of "Length of Job," described fully in Table III-9, a score of "1" indicates a job held for less than 2 months, while a score of "2" indicates a job held between 2 and 6 months. The scores in Table IV-14 are low, because the entire population of the sample was included in the analysis. Those with no job at all counterbalanced with those who had worked for many years, bringing about the averages seen in the tables.

TABLE IV-14

MEAN SCORES OF "SOCIAL NETWORK" AND
"LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE"
ON "LENGTH OF JOB"

Grand Mean	1.73	Total Population 167			
		<u>Level of Experience</u>			
<u>Social Network</u>	<u>Inexperienced</u>		<u>Experienced</u>		
	N	%	N	%	
Very Isolated	(20)	1.65	(39)	2.08	
Moderately Isolated	(42)	1.62	(41)	1.98	
Not Isolated	(14)	.36	(11)	1.91	

TABLE IV-15

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF THE EFFECTS OF
"SOCIAL NETWORK" (A) AND "LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE" (B)
ON "LENGTH OF JOB"

<u>Source</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>Mean Squared</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>P</u>
Main Effects				
A	2	5.835	1.134	.324
B	1	12.730	2.474	.118
Two-Way Interaction				
AB		3.577	.695	.500

An alternative explanation is that the isolated mothers were on the whole, a more independent group and, once they had overcome the factor of inexperience, were able to cope fairly well with separation.

As described in the section on operationalizing the variables, the relationship a mother had with her friends showed little correlation to the relationship she had with her husband, parents and relatives. This information has important implications for the study of social networks, as will be discussed more later. Due to the weak correlation, "friends" was analyzed separately in relation to "difficulty separating", and the findings were not significant (.32).

TABLE IV-16

RESPONSES TO VARIABLE "FRIENDS" ACCORDING TO
AMOUNT OF SUPPORT GIVEN

<u>Amount of Support Given By Friends</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Low	13	.08
Medium	38	.22
High	<u>117</u>	<u>.70</u>
Total	168	100.0

In discussing this finding, it is interesting to note the interactional framework of the two independent variables, social support and level of experience. As a mother who is isolated has difficulty with separation, and as a mother who is inexperienced has difficulty with separation, the combination of isolation and inexperience is likely to present serious difficulties for the mother.

In response to this, social work practitioners can intervene to combat both factors. In experience, as a factor, will diminish by itself over time, but social workers can hasten the process considerably by setting up the kind of linkages between experienced and inexperienced mothers described earlier.

Social workers can also combat the factor of isolation. Support groups of mothers can be organized at the beginning of the school year to help the mothers deal with separation issues. In fact, this would be an important area for research, as it is unclear, at this point, what kinds of support would be most helpful to the isolated mother. Do they need information? friendship? activity? Certainly the mutuality and reciprocity offered by a support group would be valuable, but perhaps helping to organize a school raffle might be as beneficial to the mothers as a discussion group.

More needs to be known about the reasons for the mothers' isolation. In the current study the role of isolation in general as a factor contributing to separation difficulty was demonstrated. An attempt was also made to see if isolation in any particular part of the mothers social network played an important role. A mother's

TABLE IV-17

ANOVA OF THE EFFECTS OF LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE
AND THE FOUR SOCIAL NETWORK COMPONENTS
TAKEN INDIVIDUALLY, ON DIFFICULTY SEPARATING

Source	df	Mean Squared	F	P
<u>Main Effects</u>				
A. Level of Experience	1	189.250	27.201	.402
B. Relationship with Parents	2	4.663	.917	.000
Two-Way Interaction				
AB	2	5.135	1.009	.367
<u>Main Effects</u>				
A. Level of Experience	1	115.009	30.318	.000
C. Relationship with Husband	2	8.159	1.596	.206
Two-Way Interaction				
AC	2	2.577	.504	.605
<u>Main Effects</u>				
A. Level of Experience	1	160.267	.490	.000
D. Relationship with Relatives	2	5.693	.119	.329
Two-Way Interaction				
AD	2	8.696	.709	.184
<u>Main Effects</u>				
A. Level of Experience	1	176.767	34.110	.000
E. Relationship with Friends	2	2.352	.454	.636
Two-Way Interaction				
AE	2	1.561	.301	.740

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relationship with her parents, her husband, her relatives, and her friends were all considered separately in relation to the difficulty separating. The result of this attempt can be seen in Table VI-17. Although no individual part of the network emerged as significantly related to difficulty separating, the measures which were used were fairly rough-hewn. It would be interesting to see if more finely-tuned measures could provide more specific information.

Hypothesis IV

The fourth hypothesis states that mothers who have a difficult time separating will be less likely to find new activities and will be less likely to have an improvement in their relationship with their children. All the mothers in the study put their children in schools and had to undergo the separation. The hypothesis states that those who had a difficult time separating will be less likely to find new activities, i.e., won't cope as well, and that their relationship with their children will not have improved.

In the other hypotheses in this study, "difficulty separating" was the dependent variable. In this hypothesis, however, it was the independent variable, as it antedated finding new activities and having a change in the mother-child relationship.

As this section of the questionnaire was given only to the "experienced" mothers, only 93 responses were possible. Of these 69 did respond. Of the 69 respondents, 37 engaged in new activities

after putting their children into school, and 32 did not.

Of the 69 respondents to the question on whether or not there was an improvement in the relationship of the mother to her child, 45 said yes and 24 said no.

TABLE IV-18
MOTHERS' CHOOSING NEW ACTIVITIES AFTER SEPARATION

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Yes	37	53.6
No	32	46.4
Total	69	100.0

TABLE IV-19
MOTHERS' REPORTING ON IMPROVED RELATIONSHIP
WITH THEIR CHILD AFTER SEPARATION

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Yes	45	65.2
No	24	34.8
Total	69	100.0

The findings did not confirm the hypothesis. The significance of the relationship between "difficulty separating" and "finding new activities" was .95. The relationship between "difficulty separating" and a "mother's sense of an improvement in her relationship with her child" was .18.

However, some very interesting findings appeared in the multiple regression analysis with each of the dependent variables. The six independent variables could account for 13.3 percent of the variance in "finding new activities." This figure is considered to be of importance in the social sciences, where measures are "soft," i.e., attitudinal, and therefore, easily fluctuating. Three predictors in particular had significant relationships to "finding new activities." They were "general morale," and "length of job," and "social class." (See Table IV 20.)

TABLE IV-20

ANOVA OF THE EFFECTS OF THE FIVE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND "DIFFICULTY SEPARATING" ON THE VARIABLE "FINDING NEW ACTIVITIES"

Source	DF	Mean Square	F	P
Difficulty Separating	1	.065	.269	.606
Age	1	.003	.011	.919
General Morale	1	.692	2.976	.097*
Length of Job	1	1.026	4.222	.044
Social Class	1	.723	2.976	.090*
Children	1	.054	.224	.638

*Indicates a two-tailed result to be divided by two as the hypothesis was one-tailed.

"General morale" had a significance level of .048 in relation to "finding new activities." This finding showed that the women who indicated greater satisfaction with their lives were the ones who were able to move on and find new activities after separation. The women who were more depressed and dissatisfied were also the ones who found no new activities after separation.

There are several possible explanation for this finding. It might be that the mothers who described themselves as satisfied with life were better adjusted mothers, the ones who were better able to adapt to everchanging demands placed upon them. They were able to readily mobilize themselves and find new activities once relieved of part of the burden of children. The depressed and dissatisfied mothers, according to this interpretation, were immobilized, unable to change. Their problems, whatever their source, were not sufficiently alleviated by the reduced burden of childcare. It may be that these mothers felt less in control of their lives, and more victimized by circumstances.

However, an alternate explanation for the correlation between the depressed mothers and the mothers who did not find new activities is that the mothers tried to find new activities and failed. This failure, then, would account for their low morale.

The relationship between "finding new activities" and "length of job" proved to be significant (.02). The mothers who had new jobs would naturally also indicate that they had found new activities. Other new activities consisted of (1) going back to school, (2) having new family responsibilities, and (3) having new social responsibilities.

(See Table IV-21)

TABLE IV-21

NEW ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY MOTHERS AFTER SEPARATION

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Work	16	.41
School	4	.10
new family responsibilities	12	.31
social responsibilities	<u>7</u>	<u>.18</u>
Total	39	100

"Social Class" also related significantly to "finding new activities" (.045). The mothers from the lower classes pursued new activities immediately after placing their children in school. The mothers from the upper classes, however, apparently continued on in their same routines and reported fewer new activities.

A possible explanation for this is that mothers from higher socioeconomic classes had more options available to them during the early child rearing years. They could more easily hire babysitters and go take a course, for example. They did not have to wait until relieved of the burden of full-time child care in order to pursue other activities.

As stated earlier the relationship between "difficulty separating" and the second dependent variable in Hypothesis 4, "improved relationship," was not significant. However, the six predictors used throughout the study taken together do explain 35.2 percent of the variance in "improved relationship." Three of the predictors had significant relationships with "improved relationship." (See Table IV-22.)

TABLE IV-22

ANOVA OF THE EFFECTS OF FIVE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND
"DIFFICULTY SEPARATING" ON "IMPROVED RELATIONSHIP"

Source of Variation	DF	Mean Square	F	P
Difficulty separating	1	.281	1.78	.188
Social class	1	1.205	7.623	.008
General morale	1	.749	4.739	.034
Number of Children	1	1.273	8.058	.006
Age	1	.041	.261	.611
Length of job	1	.211	1.335	.253

The first was "social class," which had a significance of .008. The higher the social position of a given mother in society, the less her relationship to the child placed in school improved. Conversely, the lower the class, the more the mother-child relationship improved.

This interesting and unexpected finding may be a commentary on the greater burden that childcare poses for the mother in the lower socio-economic classes. A mother from an upper class can 1) suffer less economic drain in being a mother, 2) be able to afford to spend money and time on herself, and 3) be able to afford help with childcare and housekeeping chores.

A second predictor to relate significantly to "improved relationship" was "general morale." The significance score was .03. The

finding indicated that the more satisfied and happy mothers were the same ones whose relationships with their children improved once the children were in school. Conversely, the more depressed and dissatisfied mothers were the ones whose relationships with their children stayed the same, despite the daily availability of childcare.

One possible explanation for this is psychological. The mothers who described themselves as generally satisfied were those who could really take advantage of the relief from the burden of childcare offered by the school. These mothers may be the better adjusted ones, in that their difficulties in their relationships with their children were realistic ones caused by having to spend so much time in childcare. Therefore, there was room for improvement in the relationship, as the childcare burden was considerably eased.

On the other hand, the more unhappy mothers were unable to take advantage of the relief offered by the school's assuming more of the burden of childcare. These may be mothers who were less well adjusted, i.e., whose unhappiness came from different sources other than child-rearing. With these mothers, removing the burden of childcare did not remove the source of the unhappiness.

A third predictor to relate significantly to "improved relationship" was "number of children." The significance score was .006. The finding indicated that the more children a mother had, the less her relationship with the child entering school improved.

A possible explanation for this is that a mother with only one child is markedly relieved of the burden of childcare once that child goes to school. However, a mother with several children remains

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beleaguered by childcare whether or not one of them has recently gone off to school. Therefore, whatever problems previously existed between the mother and her children remain unalleviated.

An alternative explanation for the finding that the more children a mother has the less her relationship with the child who is entering school improves is that a mother with several children must, of necessity, encourage independence in her children in order to be able to meet all of their needs. Such a mother may have already experienced many separations from her child. The current separation at school entrance, therefore, brings about no major improvement because it represents no major change.

Hypothesis 5

The fifth hypothesis stated that differences in mothers' responses to separation will relate to the mother's views of the school as supportive and helpful or not. A mother who feels the school cares about the child and herself will have an easier time separating.

Mothers were asked if they felt that the teachers had enough time for them. Of the respondents, 163 answered yes, and 11 answered no. Mothers were also asked if they felt that the teachers gave enough time to their children. Here, 167 mothers said yes and only seven said no.

The distribution of responses to these questions did not show sufficient variability to justify an analysis. The groups of respondents with negative answers were too small to form viable comparison groups. However, the lack of variability in these responses in and

of itself is a commentary on the nature of the separation experience. A large majority of the mothers found the school and its staff to be very helpful, and yet many of these mothers still found separation very difficult. This finding emphasizes the intrapsychic nature of the separation experience.

Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 stated that reactions to separation relate to the amount of separation experienced prior to school entrance. A mother who has frequently been apart from her child will experience less separation anxiety. Conversely, a mother who has never even left her child with a babysitter will experience greater separation anxiety.

The hypothesis was confirmed, and the significance was .056.

TABLE IV-23

MEAN SCORES OF PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE SEPARATING
AND LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE ON DIFFICULTY SEPARATING

Grand Mean = 11.72

Variable and Category	N	Adjusted Means
Previous Experience Separating (Part-time)		
Low	66	11.42
High	51	12.11
Level of Experience		
Inexperience	55	10.61
Experience	62	12.73

The findings indicated that mothers who spent more time away from their children before school entrance had an easier time separating from them at school entrance. The mean score of the mothers who had rarely left their children before school entrance was 11.42, a score which indicates difficulty separating. The mean score for the mothers who had frequently left their children was 12.11, a score which indicates that separation was easier. This .69 difference proved to be highly significant.

TABLE IV-24

ANOVA OF THE EFFECTS OF "PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE SEPARATING (PART-TIME)" (A)
AND OF "LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE" (B) ON "DIFFICULTY SEPARATING"

Source	DF	Mean Square	F	P
Main Effects				
A	1	13.777	2.547	.113*
B	1	132.265	24.453	.000
Two-Way Interactions				
A B	1	6.009	1.111	.294

*Indicates a two-tailed result that will be divided by two in the findings where there was a predictor.

This finding was consistent with the theories described in the

literature review that the separation process is a necessary aspect of the ongoing mother-child relationship, whether it was well underway long before school entrance, or has just received new impetus from school entrance itself.

This finding was also consistent with the finding in Hypothesis 1, where it was seen that the impact of separation diminished as mothers became habituated to it. (See discussion for Hypothesis 1.)

Hypothesis 7 through 13

Hypothesis 7 through 13 concerned the relationship of seven independent variables to the main dependent variable, "difficulty separating." The seven variables were, "general morale," "age," "social class," "ethnic group," "religion," "length of employment," and "number of children." They were given simultaneous consideration in the multiple regression analysis. The decision to treat the variables jointly was based on the consideration that the main dependent variable was so multidetermined. The findings were that, in terms of separation, none of the predictors were significant. However, in Hypothesis 5, several of the predictors were found to be significant in relation to the variables "improved relationship" and "new activities." (See the section of Hypothesis 5 for details.)

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary.

This study was a comparative, cross-sectional analysis of maternal reactions to separation from their young children at school entrance. The first observation was of mothers who were entering their children in school for the first time. This group of mothers was called the "inexperienced" group. The second observation, made concurrently, was of mothers who entered their children in school at least six months prior to the observation. These were the "experienced" mothers.

The sample population consisted of 177 mothers drawn from nine schools. Schools were chosen to provide variability in the socio-economic levels of the sample population. Data were collected by means of a written questionnaire, distributed to the mothers at the school.

The study sought to discover factors which might influence the ease or difficulty which a mother experienced during separation. Six major and seven minor hypotheses were tested. The statistical methods used were multiple regression analysis and analysis of variance.

Hypothesis 1: The first hypothesis stated that reactions of separation change over time and will be most intense at the initial separation. The hypothesis was confirmed. The separation reactions of the "inexperienced" mothers were significantly different from those of the "experienced" mothers, and in the predicted direction.

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Hypothesis 2: The second hypothesis stated that separation reactions change according to the mother's view of her relationship with her child and the degree of independence between them. For example, a mother who was able to recognize that her child is a separate individual with needs different from her own, would have less difficulty at parting than a mother who sees her child as an extension of herself.

In the operationalization of the hypothesis, four different content areas were created. The areas examined were the mothers' early mothering experience, her perceived control over her child, her assessment of the child's level of independence, and her sense of differentiation from the child. Each area was analyzed in comparison to a mother's difficulty separating.

In the findings, two areas proved to have significant relationships to the mothers' difficulty separating: her early mothering experience and her assessment of the child's current level of independence. The mothers who indicated great satisfaction with the early mothering experience were the ones who had the most difficulty separating. Those who only moderately enjoyed the early mothering experience had a much easier time separating.

In the other finding, mothers who saw their children as able to function fairly independently were able to undergo the separation with much less anxiety themselves.

Hypothesis 3: This hypothesis examined the effect of a mother's social network on her difficulty separating. It was predicted that the more isolated a mother was, the more difficulty she would have separating at school entrance.

The findings confirmed the hypothesis for the "inexperienced " mothers. The ones receiving the lowest amount of support from their husbands, parents, and relatives were very clearly the ones who had more difficulty separating.

For the "experienced" mothers, however, the reverse was true. The most isolated mothers, once they had become used to separation, had the easiest time separating. They may have been a more independent group, or they may have gone back to work earlier.

Interesting additional information about the nature of social networks emerged in the course of analyzing this hypothesis. There are currently attempts being made in the field of social sciences to evaluate the strength of a given individual's social network. In this study, it was learned that the correlation among the various elements in a mother's social network may be very low. Strong correlations existed among the items relating to a woman's husband, her parents, and her relatives. However, none of these correlated with the items relating to her friends. In other words, a woman may receive very little support from her husband and extended family, but it is impossible to predict from this whether or not she has been able to derive support from friends.

Hypothesis 4: This hypothesis stated that mothers who had difficulty separating were less likely to find new activities and also less likely to have an improvement in their relationship with their children.

The findings were not significant. However, some unexpected findings emerged in the multiple regression analysis between the variables "finding new activities" and "improved relationship" and all the independent variables.

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Three variables, "social class," "general morale" and "length of job" related significantly to the likelihood of a mother finding a new activity after placing her child in school. The happier mothers were those who found new activities, and among those who found new activities, a significant number went back to work. Also, the upper class mothers were the ones who did not pursue any new activity.

A second group of unexpected findings emerged in relation to what happens to the mother-child relationship after separation. The question asked was whether or not the relationship improved.

Three predictors related significantly to this: "social class," "general morale," and "number of children." It was learned from the data that the higher the social class of a given mother, the less her relationship to her child improved once the child was placed in school. Conversely, the lower the class, the more the mother-child relationship improved.

It was also learned that the happier and more satisfied mothers were those whose relationships with their children improved once the children were in school.

And, finally, it emerged from the data that the more children a mother had the less her relationship to the one recently placed in school would improve.

Hypothesis 5: Hypothesis 5 states that differences in the mothers' responses to separation relate to their views of the school. Do they see the school as helpful and supportive, indifferent, or even intrusive? It was hypothesized that a mother who feels that the school cares about her child and herself will have an easier time separating.

The findings were that there was no relationship between a mother's

difficulty separating and her view of the school. Mothers who had strong feelings of sadness, worry, loneliness and guilt at separation still felt that the school was very helpful. This occurred in spite of the fact that some of the schools had no orientation process whatsoever.

Hypothesis 6: Hypothesis 6 stated that separation reactions related to the amount of separation experienced prior to school entrance. It was predicted that a mother who has frequently been apart from her child will experience less separation anxiety. Conversely, a mother who has never left her child will experience greater separation anxiety.

The hypothesis was confirmed. The mothers who spent more time away from their children before school entrance had an easier time separating from them at school entrance.

Hypotheses 7 through 13: These hypotheses explored the relationship of seven antecedent or background variables and the main dependent variable, "difficulty separating." The antecedent variables were "general morale," "age," "social class," "ethnic group," "religion," "length of employment," and "number of children." None were found to relate significantly to "difficulty separating."

Strengths and Limitations

Now that this study has been completed, it is interesting to look back over it with the critical eye gained from hindsight. The strength of this study lies in its attempt to gather information about an important and fairly unresearched area of human development - namely, the nature of separation reactions. And, within this context the study accomplishes its purpose.

The study also has its limitations, and could have been improved upon. Four areas in particular come to mind.

1. Limiting and focussing the questionnaire:

The questionnaire was composed of a series of separate sections, each aiming to measure a different aspect of maternal separation reactions. In addition, in an effort to increase reliability and validity, the material in each section was approached from a number of different angles. Several quantitative questions were asked on each major point, and numerous qualitative questions were included to fill in details. The result was that the questionnaire was too long and, in some places, redundant. It took 45 minutes to complete. A more compact questionnaire could have accomplished the same task and not looked like, as some mothers said, a "book."

Limiting the questionnaire would have improved the response rate, and it also would have made the analysis of the data more straightforward. The richness of detail, which the researcher thought so desirable during the creation of the instrument, proved to be unwieldy when it came time for the analysis. Many questions were included

which could have been deleted, such as: "What was the hardest thing about caring for your child at home before he/she began school?" and "Did you know people at the school before you applied?" Questions such as these, while of interest to the researcher, could not readily be harnessed to prove or disprove the hypotheses as they stood.

2. More rigorous sampling

Sampling more rigorously would also have been desirable, since it would have increased the response rate. For example, controlling the collection of the questionnaire more tightly by obtaining names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the target population before handing out the questionnaire, and then making follow-up telephone calls and sending letters could have jostled forgetful or busy mothers into action.

3. Strengthening the design

This study was cross-sectional in nature. It analyzed two groups of women at one point in time. As a complement to this design, it would have been interesting to add a longitudinal dimension. One or both of the groups of women could have been followed over time, giving one or more "snapshots" of separation reactions at different points in time.

Seeing the reaction to separation as a process in which changes occur over time would have enriched the present findings.

4. Strengthening and Clarifying the Conceptual Approach

The present study represents an attempt to examine a number of variables which could influence a mother's separation reaction. Yet there are variables, which were not measured which might have influenced the result. One such variable is the child's separation reaction which could have influenced the mother's separation reaction. This variable could have been measured by a brief questionnaire given to the child's teachers.

A second variable which could have been measured is the quality of support present in the lives of each mother. A pattern emerged in the study in which inexperienced isolated mothers, i.e., those without much support from husband, friends or family, had much more difficulty separating. It would have been interesting to analyze this result more closely, by looking at the types of family constellations in which there was greater difficulty separating. For example, do single mothers receiving support from their own mothers have a different separation reaction from married mothers who receive support from their husbands? Although an attempt was made to distill this information from the raw data, an analysis of the distinctions among types of support had not been planned originally, and therefore the distinctions did not emerge clearly in the analysis.

Implications for Future Research

This study calls for research in three major areas. The first is the need for more inquiry into the nature and vicissitudes of the attachment bond between the mother and child. The findings of the study underscore the strength of the bond, as seen in the mothers difficulties in separating from their children. It is important for the future development of both child and mother that their mutual attachment remain intact, while still changing according to the individual needs of each mother-child pair. Much current investigation is in progress on the subject of the child's attachment, but there remains a lack of interest and inquiry on the mothers attachment. Research concerning a mother's feelings about mothering, when they originate and how they take shape as well as research concerning the changing feelings of the mother as her child grows would give insights about this important subject.

A second area calling for further investigation is the area of social networks. The study shows that mothers who were very isolated had a more difficult time with separation. For these mothers, leaving their children in school may have represented a loss, and a sense of increased isolation. It would be important to find ways of building a network for these isolated mothers.

A third area for study is separation in day care. This study clearly shows that school entrance is an important transition for mothers as well as children. Yet it is unclear what would help the mothers become able to handle the separation more easily. The findings show that the school's efforts to ease the transition do

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not alleviate the mothers' separation difficulties. The solutions lie elsewhere, not in the province of education, but in the province of social work. It would be instructive for example, to form an experiment with a group of isolated mothers, who are putting their children in school, giving half of them an extensive supportive group. Information would emerge which could be used to make separation easier for all of the mothers.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This study underscores the need for social workers to be involved in schools, as a way of gaining access to families in crisis. Schools focus primarily on children and their ability to benefit from an educational milieu. There is little emphasis on the wider world of the child, which includes both the child's emotional needs, and his relationship to his family. Social work can bring strength and expertise to these issues. Specifically, social work practitioners can develop programs within the school which exist as normal, routine functions of the school. One such program would be the establishment of support groups for isolated mothers before, during, and after school entrance. Such a program would minimize the separation difficulties for the mothers, and, in turn, the children. It would serve both as a means of helping mothers build new supports into their lives and as a way of preventing future difficulties.

Additional support for the incoming families could be derived from setting up linkages between the experienced families and the inexperienced families. A "Big Sister" program could provide

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information, encouragement, and support for the new mothers.

It would also be instrumental to familiarize the teachers with the theories about separation and the importance of a smooth and successful transition between mother and child. Teachers could be encouraged to be more attuned to the needs of the mother and child.

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Questionnaire for Mothers

Introduction

This is a questionnaire for mothers who have young children in school. We would like to find out what it's like for mothers to be leaving their young children at school. The report will be used in schools to help develop programs which make it comfortable for parents and children at the beginning of school. However, this is an independent study, and none of the specific information you give us will be available to the school.

There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. We are only interested in how you feel. Your answers will be entirely confidential, and, in the write-up of the report, no names are used and all information is generalized or disguised.

The questionnaire has 8 short sections. Please answer every question. If more than one answer seems good, choose the one best one.

We will be available to help you if you have any questions.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Columbia University School of Social Work

613 West 113th Street

New York, N.Y. 10025

Your name _____

Your child's name _____

Today's date _____

School _____

Class your child is currently entering _____

Date your child began school _____

Circle:

1. Child is now entering school for first time
2. Child has been in school six months or more

I. In this section of the questionnaire, there is a list of questions about the previous experience you have had in being away from your child.

Please circle the response that's best for you.

1. How old was your child when you first began spending a half-day or more apart from him/her?

1. birth to 6 months
2. 6 months to 1 year
3. 1 year to 2 years
4. 2 years to 3 years
5. only now, since he/she is in school

2. Once you began spending time apart from your child, how much time did you spend.

1. never apart
2. hardly ever apart
3. occasionally apart
4. often apart
5. very often apart

3. Before your child began school, how often did you leave him/her with someone else for part of the day?

1. never
2. one day a week
3. two days a week
4. three days a week
5. four days a week
6. five days a week

4. Before your child began school, how often did you leave him/her with someone else for a whole day?

1. never
2. one day a week
3. two days a week
4. three days a week
5. four days a week
6. five days a week

5. Before your child entered school, did you have any separations of one week or more from him/her?

20

1. yes
2. no

If yes, how many separations have there been up until now?

Circle 1 2 3 4 5 6 or more

21

How long were the separations in weeks?

1 2 3 3 5 6 or more

22

The reasons were:

23

1. vacation
2. illness or hospitalization
3. work-related
4. family-related
5. other _____

6. Could you say what was the hardest thing about caring for your child at home before he/she began school?

24

1. learning to discipline him/her
2. keeping him/her occupied
3. finding playmates for him/her
4. dealing with his/her clinging and whining
5. other _____

7. Could you say what was most frustrating for you about having a young child at home?

25

1. your desire to work
2. your desire for job training
3. lack of free time
4. lack of adult company
5. dealing with other family responsibilities
6. boredom
7. finding good child care
8. other _____

II. This section is about the kinds of social supports that mothers of young children have.

If you are married, answer questions 1, 2, and 3. If not, omit them.

1. In general, how much do you agree with your spouse in regard to such things as money, friends, children, home management, and ways to have fun?

1. not at all
2. hardly at all
3. a little
4. fairly much
5. very much

2. How do you feel you get along with your spouse?

1. very poorly
2. poorly
3. not well
4. fairly well
5. very well

3. How would you rate the interest which your spouse has in your daily experience?

1. almost none
2. very little
3. some
4. fairly much
5. a lot

4. How do you feel about getting together with your parent(s)?

1. dislike very much
2. dislike
3. have mixed feelings
4. like
5. like very much

5. How easy is it for you to express personal emotional feelings to your parents?

1. very easy
2. fairly easy
3. a little difficult
4. fairly difficult
5. very difficult

6. In general, can you count on your parent(s) for support?

1. not at all
2. hardly at all
3. some
4. fairly much
5. always

7. How many relatives do you have some personal contact with, even if it is only by letter?

1. none
2. 1 or 2
3. 3 or 4
4. 5 to 10
5. over 10

8. How often do you see or talk to these relatives?

1. never
2. hardly ever
3. sometimes
4. often
5. very often

9. Have these relatives been of help to you?

1. not at all
2. hardly at all
3. a little
4. fairly much
5. very much

10. In general, how do you feel about participating in clubs or groups?

1. like very much
2. like
3. no strong feelings
4. dislike
5. dislike very much

11. How many personal friends do you have at the present time?

1. none
2. one
3. two
4. three
5. four
6. more

12. How do you feel towards them?

1. very close
2. close
3. not too close
4. distant
5. very distant

13. Do your friends give you help when you need it?

1. yes
2. no

14. How frequently do you have a chance to talk with your good friends?

1. daily
2. more than once a week
3. once or twice a month
4. once or twice a year

38

39

III This next section has two parts, the first is about your child.

	Never	Hardly ever	Some- times	Fairly often	Always	
1. Does your child like to play with others?	1	2	3	4	5	41
2. Does your child initiate activities with other children?	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Does your child cry when you leave?	1	2	3	4	5	41
4. If he/she cries, does he/she stop right after you leave?	1	2	3	4	5	
5. How often does he/she show that he/she show pride in his/her accomplishments?	1	2	3	4	5	41
6. Does he/she go to the bathroom without help?	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Does he/she feed himself/herself?	1	2	3	4	5	46
8. Does he/she choose his/her own clothes?	1	2	3	4	5	
9. Does he/she use words to tell you that he/she wants something?	1	2	3	4	5	48
10. Does he/she choose to play with children, rather than with adults?	1	2	3	4	5	

11. To what extent do the following words describe your child?

	Not at all	Hardly at all	A little bit	Fairly	Very
careless	1	2	3	4	5
hard	1	2	3	4	5
worthless	1	2	3	4	5
delicate	1	2	3	4	5
daring	1	2	3	4	5
sweet	1	2	3	4	5
honest	1	2	3	4	5
calm	1	2	3	4	5
sad	1	2	3	4	5
tender	1	2	3	4	5
strong	1	2	3	4	5
sharp/clever	1	2	3	4	5
irritated	1	2	3	4	5
tense	1	2	3	4	5
quiet	1	2	3	4	5
hopeful	1	2	3	4	5
careful	1	2	3	4	5
agreeable	1	2	3	4	5
sociable	1	2	3	4	5
flashy	1	2	3	4	5

These questions are about you.

	Not at all	Hardly at all	A little bit	Fairly much	Very much	
12. Did you enjoy the period when your child was dependent on you for everything?	1	2	3	4	5	70
13. When your child throws a tantrum, are you able to stop him/her?	1	2	3	4	5	
14. When you say no, does your child obey you right away?	1	2	3	4	5	
15. Do you get upset when your child prefers to play with a friend or your spouse instead of you?	1	2	3	4	5	
16. Do you think your child is able to solve his/her own problems as they arise, in playing with other children?	1	2	3	4	5	74
17. Did you enjoy being home with your child before he/she began school?	1	2	3	4	5	
18. Did you look forward to your child beginning school?	1	2	3	4	5	
19. How satisfied are you, now that your child is in school?	1	2	3	4	5	77

20. To what extent do the following words describe you?

	Not at all	Hardly at all	A little bit	Fairly	Very	
careless	1	2	3	4	5	1
hard	1	2	3	4	5	
worthless	1	2	3	4	5	
delicate	1	2	3	4	5	
daring	1	2	3	4	5	2
sweet	1	2	3	4	5	
honest	1	2	3	4	5	
calm	1	2	3	4	5	
sad	1	2	3	4	5	2
tender	1	2	3	4	5	
strong	1	2	3	4	5	
sharp/clever	1	2	3	4	5	
irritated	1	2	3	4	5	2
tense	1	2	3	4	5	
quiet	1	2	3	4	5	
hopeful	1	2	3	4	5	
careful	1	2	3	4	5	3
agreeable	1	2	3	4	5	
sociable	1	2	3	4	5	
flashy	1	2	3	4	5	3

IV This next section is about what it was actually like
for your to leave your child at school for the first time.

1. Did you feel prepared for the initial parting from your
child when he/she started school?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

Comments _____

2. At the beginning of school, for what time periods was your
child enrolled?

- 1. full-time
- 2. part-time

Hours per day: 1 2 3 $3\frac{1}{2}$ 4 5 6 7 8
Days per week: 1 2 3 4 5

3. Did you stay with your child when he/she first began at
the school?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

If yes, for how long each day, and for how many
days per week?

Hours: $\frac{1}{2}$ 1 2 3 4 More

Days: 1 2 3 4 5

4. How hard was it for you to leave your child at school?

- 1. very hard
- 2. hard
- 3. a little bit hard
- 4. easy
- 5. very easy

5. What did you do on that first day, when your child stayed
alone at school?

- 1. work
- 2. school
- 3. family responsibilities
- 4. a social activity
- 5. other

6. Here are some words which describe ways mothers might feel after leaving their children at school for the first time. Rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how well each word describes the way you felt when your child started school.

	Not at all	Hardly at all	A little bit	Fairly	Very	
sad	1	2	3	4	5	45
happy	1	2	3	4	5	
relieved	1	2	3	4	5	
worried	1	2	3	4	5	48
guilty	1	2	3	4	5	
lonely	1	2	3	4	5	
free	1	2	3	4	5	51

Please specify if there are any other ways that you felt. _____

V This section is about how you generally feel about yourself.

1. During the past year, in general, how interested have you been in what you were doing?

1. very interested
2. fairly interested
3. somewhat interested
4. fairly uninterested
5. very uninterested

2. In general, how satisfied have you been with yourself in the last year?

1. very satisfied
2. fairly satisfied
3. sometimes satisfied
4. somewhat dissatisfied
5. very dissatisfied

3. In general, how frequently do you find yourself worrying about something?

1. always
2. fairly often
3. sometimes
4. almost never
5. never

4. In general, do you do many things that you regret afterwards?

1. very often
2. fairly often
3. sometimes
4. almost never
5. never

5. In general, how interesting do you find your daily life?

1. very interesting
2. fairly interesting
3. somewhat interesting
4. fairly uninteresting
5. very uninteresting

6. In general, does the future seem hopeful to you?

1. very hopeful
2. fairly hopeful
3. somewhat hopeful
4. not very hopeful
5. not at all hopeful

7. During the past year, how often have you felt that nothing turns out the way you want it to?

1. very often
2. fairly often
3. sometimes
4. almost never
5. never

VI In this section, questions are asked about your view of the school.

1. Did you know people at the school before you applied?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

2. How did the school help you and your child adjust during the first weeks? Circle all that apply:

- 1. parents' meeting
- 2. talking with the teacher
- 3. talking with the director
- 4. spending time in the classroom

What else would you suggest would be helpful? _____

3. Did you feel that the teacher had enough time for you?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

For your child?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

4. Was the idea of a school your idea?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

If no, then whose idea was it?

- 1. husband
- 2. relative
- 3. friend
- 4. other _____

5. If the idea was someone else's, did you like it at first?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

59

62

64

65

5. With time, peoples' feelings often change. Have your feelings about leaving your child in school changed since you first enrolled him or her?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

If yes, in what way have they changed? _____

6. Have your activities changed since you enrolled your child in school?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

If yes, what new activities do you have?

- 1. work
- 2. school
- 3. new family responsibilities
- 4. social responsibilities
- 5. other _____

7. Has your relationship with your child improved in any way?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

If yes, how? _____

8. Has there been a change in any other relationship since your child began school?

- 1. yes
- 2. no

If yes, with whom?

- 1. spouse or boyfriend
- 2. relative
- 3. friends
- 4. other children

In what way did the relationship change? _____

VII This next section is about ways you have found to adjust to your child being at school now that he/she has been there for a while.

1. Did you feel prepared for the initial parting from your child when he/she started school this year? 15.

- 1. yes
- 2. no

Comments _____

2. How hard was it for you to leave your child at school this year?

- 1. very hard
- 2. hard
- 3. a little bit hard
- 4. easy
- 5. very easy

3. What did you do on that first day, when your child stayed alone at school? 18

- 1. work
- 2. school
- 3. family responsibilities
- 4. a social activity
- 5. other _____

4. How did you feel this year after leaving your child at school?

	Not at all	Hardly at all	A little bit	Fairly	Very	
sad	1	2	3	4	5	19
happy	1	2	3	4	5	
relieved	1	2	3	4	5	21
worried	1	2	3	4	5	
guilty	1	2	3	4	5	23
lonely	1	2	3	4	5	
free	1	2	3	4	5	25

Please specify if there are any other ways that you
felt. _____

9. Have you had more contact with adults since putting your
child in school?

1. yes
2. no

VIII This section, which is the last one, asks general questions about you. Remember, everything you say is confidential.

Please circle the number of the response which most clearly describes you.

1. What is your age?

1. under 25
2. 25 to 34
3. 35 to 44
4. 45 or over

2. What is your religion?

1. Roman Catholic
2. Protestant
3. Jewish
4. Other (specify) _____
5. None

3. What is the highest grade in school that you completed?

1. some high school
2. finished high school
3. some college
4. finished college
5. some graduate courses
6. finished graduate school
7. technical degree

4. What was your total family income in the last year before taxes?

1. under \$10,000
2. \$10,000 to \$19,999
3. \$20,000 to \$29,999
4. \$30,000 to \$39,999
5. \$40,000 to \$49,999
6. \$50,000 or over

5. What is your current marital status?

1. single
2. married
3. divorced or separated
4. living with a partner

6. Indicate the racial or ethnic group with which you primarily identify.

1. Hispanic
2. Black
3. White
4. Oriental
5. Other _____

7. What is your current employment status?

1. employed full-time
2. employed part-time
3. homemaker
4. student
5. unemployed
6. other _____

8. If you are working, how long have you been employed at your current job?

1. less than 2 months
2. between 2 and 6 months
3. between 6 and 12 months
4. between 1 year and 3 years
5. between 3 years and 5 years
6. more than 5 years

9. What is your occupation? _____

10. How many people live in your household? Circle the right number.

1 2 3 4 5 6 or more

11. Who are they? Circle all that apply.

1. spouse
2. boyfriend
3. your mother
4. your father
5. children
6. other _____

12. How many children do you have?

1 2 3 4 5 6 or more

13. What are the ages of your children?

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR COOPERATION

Summary of Pilot Efforts

In preparation for this study, the researcher has attended a city-wide teachers conference on the transition from home to initial school placement, conducted several interviews with parents, held a teachers meeting on the topic of separation at the school where she is currently mental health consultant, and spoken with two day care officials, and two directors. The results of these pilot efforts all point in the same direction, namely, the transition from home to school is a major issue for children, parents and the school.

The importance of the topic can be gauged by the fact that at the Early Childhood Education Council Conference held on March 28, 1981, an all-day workshop was focused on the topic, "Transition from Home to School; Helping Children Cope with Separation and Adjustment." The workshop attracted more than 50 directors and teachers. The teachers listed the behaviors of children reacting to separation, and the list covered the full gamut of childhood behavior, from crying, shyness, thumb sucking, and clinging, to apathy and listlessness, to outbursts of aggression and temper tantrums.

Despite this wide range of intense reactions on the part of children, teachers nevertheless agreed that it is the parent who has the greatest difficulty with separation. Many of the children, they said, would have been able to manage the transition if their parents themselves had helped them. Indeed, they made it more difficult, for the parents' reactions ranged as widely and were as intense as the children's reactions. At one extreme, the teachers said, is a mother who stands at the door with her child, says to the teacher, "He's all yours,

take him," and departs abruptly. The other extreme is the mother who hovers, clings, returns frequently to the classroom and each time interrupts the child's play and throws off the child's delicate balance, reawakening the separation anxiety. Such a mother transmits her own anxiety to the child, giving him the message that indeed he cannot manage without her.

The directors present at the workshop stressed their belief that teachers should make a special effort at school entrance to talk to parents and guide them. But the teachers felt that they lacked the skills necessary in meeting the needs of parents. This point was brought home by the leader of the workshop, a consultant for the Early Childhood Educational Council, Eva Wolfson. She said that dealing with the emotional states of parents is a skill that is largely ignored in a teacher's professional training, and that lies outside the domain of education. This doesn't mean that the field of education completely ignores this area, for the Director of Day Care of the New York City Department of Health puts out some guidelines by which schools can facilitate the adjustment period. However, most of these guidelines are directed toward the child while ignoring the needs of the parents.

The teachers went on to add that their primary response towards the mothers who had separation difficulties, whether they ignored the child's initial need for their presence or were overanxious, was anger. The mothers made their job of working with the children even harder.

In searching for the variables which might relate to a mother's separation reactions, the researcher asked the teachers at her own school and two directors why they thought this transition was so momentous for

parents. They gave several reasons. Firstly, they felt the parents experienced a loss of attachment to their children, now that a number of caretaking responsibilities were transferred away from them. This was particularly strong in mothers who said they had no one else important in their lives, and felt a wave of loneliness overcome them at the visible and concrete step of placing their child in school. Secondly, they felt that the current separation stirred up many previous separations in the life of the mother, forcing her to cope again with her own past experiences. A third variable the school staff felt was crucial was the mother's own expectation for her child and her distress when her child did not live up to her ideal image of him. The mothers felt that their child's behavior reflected their success or failure as parents. They saw the child as an extension of themselves and based their expectations for him on their own needs, rather than the child's.

The researcher has taken into account these variables and included them, in operational form, in her test instrument. The results of these pilot efforts showed the researcher, more clearly than ever, the strong need to give help to parents at this crucial time in their history.

Later, after the questionnaire was constructed, it was pretested on five mothers with young children. Needed clarifications arising from information gathered from the pretesting were incorporated into the instrument.